



THE PLAYS OF  
ARISTOPHANES

I

THE ACHARNIANS

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

DICAEOPOLIS

HERALD

AMPHITHEUS

AMBASSADORS

PSEUDARTABAS

THEORUS

DAUGHTER OF DICAEOPOLIS

SLAVE OF EURIPIDES

EURIPIDES

LAMACHUS

A MEGARIAN

TWO YOUNG GIRLS, *daughters of the Megarian*

AN INFORMER

A BOEOTIAN

NICARCHUS

SLAVE OF LAMACHUS

A HUSBANDMAN

A WEDDING GUEST

CHORUS OF ACHARNIAN CHARCOAL BURNERS



## INTRODUCTION

PRODUCED at the Lenaeon festival in 425 under the pseudonym of Callistratus, *The Acharnians* is the earliest comedy of Aristophanes that we possess and the third which we know him to have written. In competition with productions of the older and famous Eupolis and Cratinus the work of the youngster was awarded the highest prize, and this was doubtless the first victory of his career. The play is remarkable less for the skill with which it is constructed or for the essential humour of the plot itself, than for the variety of its incidents and the brilliance of their treatment. Clearly political, rather than social or literary, in its theme, it constitutes, with *Peace* and *Lysistrata*, a triad of political plays that have as their underlying purpose the urging of a truce on the Athenian populace.

When the play opens, we are presented with Dicaeopolis, that model of what Aristophanes thought a "good citizen" ought to be, sitting alone in the Pnyx, waiting for the arrival of a characteristically belated Athenian Assembly and musing on the many misfortunes and few joys which have been his since the beginning of the war. The Assembly finally convenes, with Dicaeopolis firmly resolved to let nothing stand in the way of concluding a truce with the Peloponnesians, but he is quickly and bitterly disappointed when the wretched Amphytheus is silenced after proposing just such a measure. Driven to desperation by the absurd reports and spurious specimens of the wonders of Persia presented by the newly returned embassy, the "good citizen" commissions Amphytheus to negotiate with Sparta a private truce for him and his family.

While he is impatiently awaiting the return of his envoy he is forced to listen to another ambassadorial report, this time concerning the Thracian Sitalces, and to witness the wretched samples of northern soldiery proudly introduced as the "host of the Odomanti." Affecting to have felt a drop of rain, he announces it as an omen, and on this preposterous pretext the magistrates adjourn the grateful Assembly. At this juncture Amphytheus returns, hotly pursued by the Elders of Acharnae; his youthful vigour, however, has enabled him to outdistance his followers sufficiently to give Dicaeopolis an opportunity to taste and to test the sample

truces that Sparta is willing to offer, and furthermore to select and to ratify that of thirty years' duration as the most delectable and desirable.

As soon as he has entered his house to prepare for the celebration of the rural Dionysia and Amphytheus has fled, never to return, the Chorus of Acharnian Elders enters, fiercely searching for the man who has had the impudence and the temerity to conclude a truce with Sparta. Soon Dicaeopolis emerges from his dwelling, followed by his family, and the phallic procession is organized and commenced. The Acharnians, perceiving that this is the man they are looking for, set upon him and are on the point of stoning him, when he exhibits the characteristic resourcefulness of an Aristophanic hero, rushes into the house, and a moment later returns with a basket of charcoal. Using this "fellow-citizen" of the Acharnians as a hostage, he persuades or coerces them into letting him plead his case with his head on a block.

Realizing that it is pity above all that he must arouse, and distrustful of his own oratorical talents, he resolves to go to Euripides, whose house, with comic convenience, is juxtaposed to his, and to borrow the theatrical costume of the most miserable of the many wretched heroes which that eminently pathetic tragedian has introduced on the stage. Dicaeopolis succeeds in obtaining almost everything he needs from the exasperated poet, who feels that the foundations of his art are thus being undermined; "Miserable man! you are stealing a whole tragedy," he exclaims. Dicaeopolis, now garbed in the most pitiable manner possible, returns to the Acharnians, lays his head on the block, and delivers a sound and telling speech in favour of the Spartans.

The effect is to divide the Chorus; half of them are won over, half stubbornly unaffected, and a scuffle ensues. The leader of the die-hards calls for assistance on the belligerent Lamachus, whom the demands of the play have forced to dwell next to Euripides and but two doors from the pacificistic Dicaeopolis. The doughty general immediately sallies forth, fully and resplendently panoplied, but the subtle arguments of the "good citizen" are too much for him, and he returns to his house in evident discomfiture. Dicaeopolis now proclaims the cessation of all war-time boycotts so far as he is concerned, and enters his house, leaving the stage to the Chorus, which delivers the parabasis.

The anapests contain a recital of the services which the poet claims to have rendered to his native city, chief amongst them being the caution against the deceptive flattery of foreigners. The ode celebrates the Muse of Acharnae in lyric and fiery language whose metaphors, like so many others in this comedy, are derived from charcoal-burning. The epirrheme pleads the case of Acharnae and particularly that of the old against the young. The antode and the antepirrheme extend and elaborate this motif.

At the conclusion of the parabasis, Dicaeopolis comes out of his house

and defines his market-place. Immediately a Megarian enters and vividly portrays, as much in his own wretched person as by the reports which he gives of conditions at home, the distress caused by Pericles' famous and fulminous decree. The Megarian is succeeded by a Boeotian, who is effectively contrasted with his predecessor; sleek and fat, possessing good victuals in abundance, he is perhaps meant to indicate what Megara might have had if the fatal boycott had not been applied. As soon as Dicaeopolis and the Boeotian have come to the conclusion that the only Athenian product not found in Boeotia is informers, Nicarchus, an eminent representative of that despicable profession, appears; he is forthwith seized and packed in hay, like a vase, and carried off by the Boeotian. A slave belonging to Lamachus approaches and seeks to purchase the Copaic eel, but Dicaeopolis refuses to sell him one, thus fulfilling to the last detail the proclamation made before the parabasis, to the effect that his market is to be open to the Megarians and to the Boeotians but closed to Lamachus.

A herald appears and announces the Anthesterian feast, and Dicaeopolis sets his slaves to work preparing the fine foods which he can now enjoy. While this pleasant exercise is occupying the "good citizen" another herald arrives and proclaims to Lamachus that the generals have ordered him to set forth on an expedition immediately. The ensuing scene, in which Dicaeopolis is gaily preparing for the feast and Lamachus gloomily getting ready for the campaign, is one of the best in the play, and the poet makes full use of the opportunities which this sharp and suggestive contrast offers. Finally both worthies depart in opposite directions amid the impartial felicitations of the Chorus. In the final scene both Lamachus and Dicaeopolis return almost simultaneously from their respective activities, the former having been badly wounded in a ridiculous adventure, the latter magnificently inebriated and amusing each hand with a different girl. The comedy ends with a varied lyric passage in which the pained and woeful groans of the general alternate with the triumphant and amorous shouts of the pacifist.

It has been sagely observed that if we had the misfortune to possess but a single comedy of Aristophanes, we should be least afflicted if the sole representative of his art were *The Acharnians*, and indeed this composition acquaints us with a comfortable majority of his talents and nearly all of the objects of his scorn. Many of the later comedies are more abundantly endowed with artistic unity and comic intensity, but there is little of importance in them which is not clearly, if briefly, foreshadowed in *The Acharnians*. Almost as if he were writing a dramatic introduction to all his works and a general analysis of his own heart, the son of Philippus dilates our eyes and delights our minds with a gaudy and compendious succession of scenes in which the tragic follies of the war-

party, the lugubrious fopperies of Euripides, the proud gullibility of the Athenians, and the careless inhumanity of their foreign policy are equally and effectively lampooned.

A further uniqueness of *The Acharnians* is discernible in the fact that of all his heroes none is so dear to Aristophanes as Dicaeopolis, and nowhere else has the poet elected to fill the mouth of an individual with sentiments so clearly his own; the "good citizen" even speaks of himself as having written comedies! Amongst the eleven comedies that have come down to us, there are several which are evidently better than *The Acharnians*; there is none which is so comprehensively Aristophanic.

## THE ACHARNIANS

(SCENE:—*The Orchestra represents the Pnyx at Athens; in the background are the usual houses, this time three in number, belonging to Dicaeopolis, Euripides, and Lamachus respectively.*)

DICAEOPOLIS (*alone*)

WHAT cares have not gnawed at my heart and how few have been the pleasures in my life! Four, to be exact, while my troubles have been as countless as the grains of sand on the shore! Let me see! of what value to me have been these few pleasures? Ah! I remember that I was delighted in soul when Cleon had to cough up those five talents; I was in ecstasy and I love the Knights for this deed; "it is an honour to Greece." But the day when I was impatiently awaiting a piece by Æschylus,<sup>1</sup> what tragic despair it caused me when the herald called, "Theognis, introduce your Chorus!" Just imagine how this blow struck straight at my heart! On the other hand, what joy Dexitheus caused me at the musical competition, when right after Moschus he played a Boeotian melody on the lyre! But this year by contrast! Oh! what deadly torture to hear Chaeris perform the prelude in the Orthian mode!—Never, however, since I began to bathe, has the dust hurt my eyes as it does to-day. Still it is the day of assembly; all should be here at daybreak, and yet the Pnyx is still deserted. They are gossiping in the market-place, slipping hither and thither to avoid the vermilioned rope.<sup>2</sup> The Prytanes even do not come; they will be late, but when they come they will push and fight each other for a seat in the front row. They will never trouble themselves with the question of peace. Oh! Athens! Athens! As for myself, I do not fail to come here before all the rest, and now, finding myself alone, I groan, yawn, stretch, fart, and know not what to do; I make sketches in the dust, pull out my loose hairs, muse, think of my fields, long for peace, curse town life and regret my dear country home, which never told me to "buy fuel, vinegar or oil": there the word "buy," which cuts me in two, was unknown; I harvested everything at will. Therefore I have come to the assembly fully prepared to bawl, interrupt and abuse the speakers, if they

talk of anything but peace. (*The Orchestra begins to fill with people.*) But here come the Prytanes, and high time too, for it is midday! There, just as I said, they are pushing and fighting for the front seats.

HERALD (*officiously*)

Step forward, step forward, get within the consecrated area.

AMPHITHEUS (*rising*)

Has anyone spoken yet?

HERALD

Who asks to speak?

AMPHITHEUS

I do.

HERALD

Your name?

AMPHITHEUS

Amphitheus.

HERALD

Are you not a man?

AMPHITHEUS

No! I am an immortal! Amphitheus was the son of Ceres and Triptolemus; of him was born Celeus, Celeus wedded Phaenereté, my grandmother, whose son was Lycinus, and, being born of him I am an immortal; it is to me alone that the gods have entrusted the duty of treating with the Lacedaemonians. But, citizens, though I am immortal, I am dying of hunger; the Prytanes give me nothing.

HERALD (*calling*)

Officers!

AMPHITHEUS (*as the Scythian policemen seize him*)

Oh, Triptolemus and Celeus, do ye thus forsake your own blood?

DICAEOPOLIS (*rising*)

Prytanes, in expelling this citizen, you are offering an outrage to the Assembly. He only desired to secure peace for us and to sheathe the sword.

(*The Scythians release Amphitheus.*)

HERALD

Sit down! Silence!

DICAEPOLIS

No, by Apollo, I will not, unless you are going to discuss the question of peace.

HERALD (*ignoring this; loudly*)

The ambassadors, who are returned from the Court of the King!

DICAEPOLIS

Of what King? I am sick of all those fine birds, the peacock ambassadors and their swagger.

HERALD

Silence!

DICAEPOLIS (*as he perceives the entering ambassadors dressed in the Persian mode*)

Oh! oh! By Ecbatana, what a costume!

AMBASSADOR (*pompously*)

During the archonship of Euthymenes, you sent us to the Great King on a salary of two drachmae per diem

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

Ah! those poor drachmae!

AMBASSADOR

We suffered horribly on the plains of the Cayster, sleeping under a tent, stretched deliciously on fine chariots, half dead with weariness.

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

And I was very much at ease, lying on the straw along the battlements!

AMBASSADOR

Everywhere we were well received and forced to drink delicious wine out of golden or crystal flagons. . . .

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

Oh, city of Cranaus, thy ambassadors are laughing at thee!

AMBASSADOR

For great feeders and heavy drinkers are alone esteemed as men by the barbarians.

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

Just as here in Athens, we only esteem the wenchers and pederasts.

## AMBASSADOR

At the end of the fourth year we reached the King's Court, but he had left with his whole army to take a crap, and for the space of eight months he was thus sitting on the can in the midst of the golden mountains.

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

And how long did it take him to close his arse? A month?

## AMBASSADOR

After this he returned to his palace; then he entertained us and had us served with oxen roasted whole in an oven.

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

Who ever saw an ox roasted in an oven? What a lie!

## AMBASSADOR

And one day, by Zeus, he also had us served with a bird three times as large as Cleonymus, and called the Hoax.

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

And do we give you two drachmæ, that you should hoax us thus?

## AMBASSADOR

We are bringing to you Pseudartabas, the King's Eye.

## DICAEPOLIS

I would a crow might pluck out yours with his beak, you cursed ambassador!

HERALD (*loudly*)

The King's Eye!

(*Enter PSEUDARTABAS, in Persian costume; his mask is one great eye; he is accompanied by two eunuchs*)

DICAEPOLIS (*as he sees him*)

Good God! Friend, with your great eye, round like the hole through which the oarsman passes his sweep, you have the air of a galley doubling a cape to gain port.

## AMBASSADOR

Come, Pseudartabas, give forth the message for the Athenians with which you were charged by the Great King.

## PSEUDARTABAS

I ártamáne Xárxas ápiaóna satrá.<sup>3</sup>



AMBASSADOR (*to DICAEPOLIS*)

Do you understand what he says?

DICAEPOLIS

God, no!

AMBASSADOR (*to the PRYTANES*)

He says that the Great King will send you gold (*to PSEUDARTABAS*)  
Come, utter the word 'gold' louder and more distinctly.

PSEUDARTABAS

Thou shalt not have gold, thou gaping-arsed Ionian.

DICAEPOLIS

Ah! God help us, but *that's* clear enough!

AMBASSADOR

What does he say?

DICAEPOLIS

That the Ionians are gaping-arsed, if they expect to receive gold from  
the barbarians.

AMBASSADOR

Not so, he speaks of bushels of gold.

DICAEPOLIS

What bushels? You're nothing but a wind-bag; get out of the way; I  
will find out the truth by myself. (*to PSEUDARTABAS*) Come now, answer  
me clearly, if you do not wish me to dye your skin red. Will the Great  
King send us gold? (*PSEUDARTABAS makes a negative sign.*) Then our  
ambassadors are seeking to deceive us? (*PSEUDARTABAS signs affirmatively.*)  
These fellows make signs like any Greek; I am sure that they  
are nothing but Athenians. Oh! ho! I recognize one of these eunuchs; it  
is Clisthenes, the son of Silyrtius. Behold the effrontery of this shaven  
and provocative arse! How, you big baboon, with such a beard do you  
seek to play the eunuch to us? And this other one? Is it not Straton?

HERALD

Silence! Sit down! The Senate invites the King's Eye to the Prytaneum.  
(*The AMBASSADORS and PSEUDARTABAS depart.*)

DICAEPOLIS

Is this not sufficient to drive a man to hang himself? Here I stand  
chilled to the bone, whilst the doors of the Prytaneum fly wide open to  
lodge such rascals. But I will do something great and bold. Where is Am-  
phitheus? Come and speak with me.

## AMPHITHEUS

Here I am.

## DICAEPOLIS

Take these eight drachmae and go and conclude a truce with the Lacedæmonians for me, my wife and my children; I leave you free, my dear Prytanes, to send out embassies and to stand gaping in the air.

(AMPHITHEUS *rushes out.*)

## HERALD

Bring in Theorus, who has returned from the Court of Sitalces.

THEORUS (*rising; he wears a Thracian costume*)

I am here.

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

Another humbug!

## THEORUS

We should not have remained long in Thrace . . .

## DICAEPOLIS

. . . if you had not been well paid.

## THEORUS

. . . if the country had not been covered with snow; the rivers were ice-bound . . .

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

That was when Theognis produced his tragedy.

## THEORUS

. . . during the whole of that time I was holding my own with Sitalces, cup in hand; and, in truth, he adored you to such a degree that he wrote on the walls, "How beautiful are the Athenians!" His son, to whom we gave the freedom of the city, burned with desire to come here and eat sausages at the feast of the Apaturia; he prayed his father to come to the aid of his new country and Sitalces swore on his goblet that he would succour us with such a host that the Athenians would exclaim, "What a cloud of grasshoppers!"

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

Damned if I believe a word of what you tell us! Excepting the grasshoppers, there is not a grain of truth in it all!

## THEORUS

And he has sent you the most warlike soldiers of all Thrace.

DICAEPOLIS (*aside*)

Now we shall begin to see clearly.

HERALD

Come hither, Thracians, whom Theorus brought.

(A few Thracians are ushered in; they have a most unwarlike appearance; the most striking feature of their costume is the circumcised phallus.)

DICAEPOLIS

What plague have we here?

THEORUS

The host of the Odomanti.

DICAEPOLIS

Of the Odomanti? Tell me what it means. Who sliced their tools like that?

THEORUS

If they are given a wage of two drachmae, they will put all Boeotia to fire and sword.

DICAEPOLIS

Two drachmae to those circumcised hounds! Groan aloud, ye people of rowers, bulwark of Athens! (*The Odomanti steal his sack*) Ah! great gods! I am undone; these Odomanti are robbing me of my garlic! Give me back my garlic.

THEORUS

Oh! wretched man! do not go near them; they have eaten garlic.

DICAEPOLIS

Prytanes, will you let me be treated in this manner, in my own country and by barbarians? But I oppose the discussion of paying a wage to the Thracians; I announce an omen; I have just felt a drop of rain.'

HERALD

Let the Thracians withdraw and return the day after tomorrow, the Prytanes declare the sitting at an end.

(*All leave except DICAEPOLIS.*)

DICAEPOLIS

Ye gods, what garlic I have lost! But here comes Amphitheus returned from Lacedaemon. Welcome, Amphitheus.

(*AMPHITHEUS enters, very much out of breath.*)

## AMPHITHEUS

No, there is no welcome for me and I fly as fast as I can, for I am pursued by the Acharnians.

## DICAEPOLIS

Why, what has happened?

## AMPHITHEUS

I was hurrying to bring your treaty of truce, but some old dotards from Acharnae got scent of the thing; they are veterans of Marathon, tough as oak or maple, of which they are made for sure—rough and ruthless. They all started shouting: "Wretch! you are the bearer of a treaty, and the enemy has only just cut our vines!" Meanwhile they were gathering stones in their cloaks, so I fled and they ran after me shouting.

## DICAEPOLIS

Let 'em shout as much as they please! But have you brought me a treaty?

## AMPHITHEUS

Most certainly, here are three samples to select from, this one is five years old; taste it.

(*He hands DICAEPOLIS a bottle.*)

## DICAEPOLIS

Faugh!

## AMPHITHEUS

What's the matter?

## DICAEPOLIS

I don't like it; it smells of pitch and of the ships they are fitting out.

AMPHITHEUS (*handing him another bottle*)

Here is another, ten years old; taste it.

## DICAEPOLIS

It smells strongly of the delegates, who go around the towns to chide the allies for their slowness.<sup>5</sup>

AMPHITHEUS (*handing him a third bottle*)

This last is a truce of thirty years, both on sea and land.

## DICAEPOLIS

Oh! by Bacchus! what a bouquet! It has the aroma of nectar and ambrosia; this does not say to us, "Provision yourselves for three days." But it lisps the gentle numbers, "Go whither you will." I accept it, ratify it,

drink it at one draught and consign the Acharnians to limbo. Freed from the war and its ills, I shall celebrate the rural Dionysia.

AMPHITHEUS

And I shall run away, for I'm mortally afraid of the Acharnians.  
(AMPHITHEUS *runs off*. DICAEOPOLIS *goes into his house, carrying his truce*. The CHORUS OF ACHARNIAN CHARCOAL BURNERS *enters, in great haste and excitement*.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This way all! Let us follow our man; we will demand him of everyone we meet; the public weal makes his seizure imperative. Ho, there! tell me which way the bearer of the truce has gone.

CHORUS (*singing*)

He has escaped us, he has disappeared. Damn old age! When I was young, in the days when I followed Phayllus, running with a sack of coals on my back, this wretch would not have eluded my pursuit, let him be as swift as he will.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But now my limbs are stiff; old Lacratides feels his legs are weighty and the traitor escapes me. No, no, let us follow him; old Acharnians like ourselves shall not be set at naught by a scoundrel . . .

CHORUS (*singing*)

. . . who has dared, by Zeus, to conclude a truce when I wanted the war continued with double fury in order to avenge my ruined lands. No mercy for our foes until I have pierced their hearts like a sharp reed, so that they dare never again ravage my vineyards.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, let us seek the rascal; let us look everywhere, carrying our stones in our hands; let us hunt him from place to place until we trap him; I could never, never tire of the delight of stoning him.

DICAEOPOLIS (*from within*)

Peace! profane men!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Silence all! Friends, do you hear the sacred formula? Here is he, whom we seek! This way, all! Get out of his way, surely he comes to offer an oblation.

(The CHORUS *withdraws to one side*.)

DICAEOPOLIS (*comes out with a pot in his hand; he is followed by*

*his wife, his daughter, who carries a basket, and two slaves, who carry the phallus.)*

Peace, profane men! Let the basket-bearer come forward, and thou, Xanthias, hold the phallus well upright. Daughter, set down the basket and let us begin the sacrifice.

DAUGHTER OF DICAEPOLIS (*putting down the basket and taking out the sacred cake*)

Mother, hand me the ladle, that I may spread the sauce on the cake

DICAEPOLIS

It is well! Oh, mighty Bacchus, it is with joy that, freed from military duty, I and all mine perform this solemn rite and offer thee this sacrifice; grant that I may keep the rural Dionysia without hindrance and that this truce of thirty years may be propitious for me. Come, my child, carry the basket gracefully and with a grave, demure face. Happy he who shall be your possessor and embrace you so firmly at dawn, that you fart like a weasel. Go forward, and have a care they don't snatch your jewels in the crowd. Xanthias, walk behind the basket-bearer and hold the phallus well erect; I will follow, singing the Phallic hymn; thou, wife, look on from the top of the terrace. Forward!

(*He sings*)

Oh, Phalés, companion of the orgies of Bacchus, night reveller, god of adultery and of pederasty, these past six years I have not been able to invoke thee. With what joy I return to my farmstead, thanks to the truce I have concluded, freed from cares, from fighting and from Lamachuses! How much sweeter, oh Phalés, Phalés, is it to surprise Thratta, the pretty woodmaid, Strymodorus' slave, stealing wood from Mount Phelleus, to catch her under the arms, to throw her on the ground and lay her, Oh, Phalés, Phalés! If thou wilt drink and bemuse thyself with me, we shall to-morrow consume some good dish in honour of the peace, and I will hang up my buckler over the smoking hearth.

(*The procession reaches the place where the CHORUS is hiding.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

That's the man himself. Stone him, stone him, stone him, strike the wretch. All, all of you, pelt him, pelt him!

DICAEPOLIS (*using his pot for a shield*)

What is this? By Heracles, you will smash my pot.

(*The daughter and the two slaves retreat.*)

CHORUS (*singing excitedly*)

It is you that we are stoning, you miserable scoundrel.

DICAEPOLIS

And for what sin, Acharnian elders, tell me that!

CHORUS (*singing, with greater excitement*)

You ask that, you impudent rascal, traitor to your country; you alone amongst us all have concluded a truce, and you dare to look us in the face!

DICAEPOLIS

But you do not know *why* I have treated for peace. Listen!

CHORUS (*singing fiercely*)

Listen to you? No, no, you are about to die, we will annihilate you with our stones.

DICAEPOLIS

But first of all, listen. Stop, my friends.

CHORUS (*singing; with intense hatred*)

I will hear nothing; do not address me; I hate you more than I do Cleon, whom one day I shall flay to make sandals for the Knights. Listen to your long speeches, after you have treated with the Laconians? No, I will punish you.

DICAEPOLIS

Friends, leave the Laconians out of debate and consider only whether I have not done well to conclude my truce.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Done well! when you have treated with a people who know neither gods, nor truth, nor faith.

DICAEPOLIS

We attribute too much to the Laconians; as for myself, I know that they are not the cause of all our troubles.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh, indeed, rascal! You dare to use such language to me and then expect me to spare you!

DICAEPOLIS

No, no, they are not the cause of all our troubles, and I who address you claim to be able to prove that they have much to complain of in us.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This passes endurance; my heart bounds with fury. Thus you dare to defend our enemies.

## DICAEPOLIS

Were my head on the block I would uphold what I say and rely on the approval of the people.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Comrades, let us hurl our stones and dye this fellow purple.

## DICAEPOLIS

What black fire-brand has inflamed your heart! You will not hear me? You really will not, Acharnians?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No, a thousand times, no.

## DICAEPOLIS

This is a hateful injustice.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

May I die if I listen.

## DICAEPOLIS

Nay, nay! have mercy, have mercy, Acharnians.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You shall die.

## DICAEPOLIS

Well, blood for blood! I will kill your dearest friend. I have here the hostages of Acharnae; I shall disembowel them.

*(He goes into the house.)*

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Acharnians, what means this threat? Has he got one of our children in his house? What gives him such audacity?

DICAEPOLIS *(coming out again)*

Stone me, if it please you; I shall avenge myself on this. *(He shows them a basket.)* Let us see whether you have any love for your coals.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Great Gods! this basket is our fellow-citizen. Stop, stop, in heaven's name!

## DICAEPOLIS

I shall dismember it despite your cries; I will listen to nothing.



CHORUS (*singing; tragically*)

How, will you kill this coal-basket, my beloved comrade?

DICAEOPOLIS

Just now you would not listen to me.

CHORUS (*singing; plaintively*)

Well, speak now, if you will; tell us, tell us you have a weakness for the Lacedaemonians. I consent to anything; never will I forsake this dear little basket.

DICAEOPOLIS

First, throw down your stones.

CHORUS (*singing; mockly*)

There! it's done. And you put away your sword.

DICAEOPOLIS

Let me see that no stones remain concealed in your cloaks.

CHORUS (*singing; petulantly*)

They are all on the ground; see how we shake our garments. Come, no haggling, lay down your sword; we threw away everything while crossing from one side of the Orchestra to the other.

DICAEOPOLIS

What cries of anguish you would have uttered had these coals of Parnes been dismembered, and yet it came very near it; had they perished, their death would have been due to the folly of their fellow-citizens. The poor basket was so frightened, look, it has shed a thick black dust over me, the same as a cuttle-fish does. What an irritable temper! You shout and throw stones, you will not hear my arguments—not even when I propose to speak in favour of the Lacedaemonians with my head on the block; and yet I cling to life.

(*He goes into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing; belligerently again*)

Well then, bring out a block before your door, scoundrel, and let us hear the good grounds you can give us; I am curious to know them. Now mind, as you proposed yourself, place your head on the block and speak.

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out of his house, carrying a block*)

Here is the block; and, though I am but a very sorry speaker, I wish nevertheless to talk freely of the Lacedaemonians and without the protection of my buckler. Yet I have many reasons for fear. I know our rus-

tics; they are delighted if some braggart comes, and rightly or wrongly, loads both them and their city with praise and flattery; they do not see that such toad-eaters are traitors, who sell them for gain. As for the old men, I know their weakness; they only seek to overwhelm the accused with their votes. Nor have I forgotten how Cleon treated me because of my comedy last year; he dragged me before the Senate and there he uttered endless slanders against me; it was a tempest of abuse, a deluge of lies. Through what a slough of mud he dragged me! I almost perished. Permit me, therefore, before I speak, to dress in the manner most likely to draw pity.

CHORUS (*singing; querulously*)

What evasions, subterfuges and delays! Wait! here is the sombre helmet of Pluto with its thick bristling plume; Hieronymus lends it to you; then open Sisyphus' bag of wiles; but hurry, hurry, for our discussion does not admit of delay.

DICAEOPOLIS

The time has come for me to manifest my courage, so I will go and seek Euripides. (*Knocking on EURIPIDES' door*) Ho! slave, slave!

SLAVE (*opening the door and poking his head out*)

Who's there?

DICAEOPOLIS

Is Euripides at home?

SLAVE

He is and he isn't; understand that, if you can.

DICAEOPOLIS

What's that? He is and he *isn't*!

SLAVE

Certainly, old man; busy gathering subtle fancies here and there, his mind is not in the house, but he himself is; perched aloft, he is composing a tragedy.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, Euripides, you are indeed happy to have a slave so quick at repartee! Now, fellow, call your master.

SLAVE

Impossible! (*He slams the door.*)

DICAEPOLIS

Too bad. But I will not give up. Come, let us knock at the door again. Euripides, my little Euripides, my darling Euripides, listen; never had man greater right to your pity. It is Dicaeopolis of the Chollidan Deme who calls you. Do you hear?

EURIPIDES (*from within*)

I have no time to waste.

DICAEPOLIS

Very well, have yourself wheeled out here.

EURIPIDES

Impossible.

DICAEPOLIS

Nevertheless . . .

EURIPIDES

Well, let them roll me out; as to coming down, I have not the time.  
(*The eccyclema turns and presents the interior of the house. EURIPIDES is lying on a bed, his slave beside him. On the back wall are hung up tragic costumes of every sort and a multitude of accessories is piled up on the floor.*)

DICAEPOLIS

Euripides . . .

EURIPIDES

What words strike my ear?

DICAEPOLIS

You perch aloft to compose tragedies, when you might just as well do them on the ground. No wonder you introduce cripples on the stage. And why do you dress in these miserable tragic rags? No wonder your heroes are beggars. But, Euripides, on my knees I beseech you, give me the tatters of some old piece; for I have to treat the Chorus to a long speech, and if I do it badly it is all over with me.

EURIPIDES

What rags do you prefer? Those in which I rigged out Oeneus on the stage, that unhappy, miserable old man?

DICAEPOLIS

No, I want those of some hero still more unfortunate.

EURIPIDES

Of Phœnix, the blind man?

DICAEPOLIS

No, not of Phœnix, you have another hero more unfortunate than him.

EURIPIDES (*to himself*)

Now, what tatters *does* he want? (*to DICAEPOLIS*) Do you mean those of the beggar Philoctetes?

DICAEPOLIS

No, of another far more beggarly.

EURIPIDES

Is it the filthy dress of the lame fellow, Bellerophon?

DICAEPOLIS

No, not Bellerophon; the one I mean was not only lame and a beggar, but boastful and a fine speaker.

EURIPIDES

Ah! I know, it is Telephus, the Mysian.

DICAEPOLIS

Yes, Telephus. Give me his rags, I beg of you.

EURIPIDES

Slave! give him Telephus' tatters; they are on top of the rags of Thyestes and mixed with those of Ino. There they are; take them.

DICAEPOLIS (*holding up the costume for the audience to see*)

Oh! Zeus, whose eye pierces everywhere and embraces all, permit me to assume the most wretched dress on earth. Euripides, cap your kindness by giving me the little Mysian hat, that goes so well with these tatters. I must to-day have the look of a beggar; "be what I am, but not appear to be"; the audience will know well who I am, but the Chorus will be fools enough not to, and I shall dupe them with my subtle phrases.

EURIPIDES

I will give you the hat; I love the clever tricks of an ingenious brain like yours.

DICAEPOLIS

Rest happy, and may it befall Telephus as I wish. Ah, I already feel myself filled with quibbles. But I must have a beggar's staff.

EURIPIDES (*handing him a staff*)

Here you are, and now get away from this porch.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, my soul! You see how you are driven from this house, when I still need so many accessories. But let us be pressing, obstinate, importunate. Euripides, give me a little basket with a lamp lighted inside.

EURIPIDES

Whatever do you want such a thing as that for?

DICAEOPOLIS

I do not need it, but I want it all the same.

EURIPIDES (*handing him a basket*)

You importune me; get out of here!

DICAEOPOLIS

Alas! may the gods grant you a destiny as brilliant as your mother's.<sup>6</sup>

EURIPIDES

Leave me in peace.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, just a little broken cup.

EURIPIDES (*handing him a cup*)

Take it and go and hang yourself. (*to himself*) What a tiresome fellow!

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! you do not know all the pain you cause me. Dear, good Euripides, just a little pot with a sponge for a stopper.

EURIPIDES

Miserable man! You are stealing a whole tragedy. Here, take it and be off.

(*He hands DICAEOPOLIS a pot.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

I am going, but, great gods! I need one thing more; unless I have it, I am a dead man. Hearken, my little Euripides, only give me this and I go, never to return. For pity's sake, do give me a few small herbs for my basket.

EURIPIDES

You wish to ruin me then. Here, take what you want; but it is all over with my plays!

(*He hands him some herbs.*)

## DICAEOPOLIS

I won't ask another thing; I'm going. I am too importunate and forget that I rouse against me the hate of kings. (*He starts to leave, then returns quickly*) Ah! wretch that I am! I am lost! I have forgotten one thing, without which all the rest is as nothing. Euripides, my excellent Euripides, my dear little Euripides, may I die if I ask you again for the smallest present; only one, the last, absolutely the last; give me some of the chervil your mother left you in her will.

## EURIPIDES

Insolent hound! Slave, lock the door! (*The eccyclema turns back again.*)

## DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, my soul! we must go away without the chervil. Art thou sensible of the dangerous battle we are about to engage upon in defending the Lacedaemonians? Courage, my soul, we must plunge into the midst of it. Dost thou hesitate and art thou fully steeped in Euripides? That's right! do not falter, my poor heart, and let us risk our head to say what we hold for truth. Courage and boldly to the front. I am astonished at my bravery. (*He approaches the block.*)

CHORUS (*singing; excitedly*)

What do you purport doing? what are you going to say? What an impudent fellow! what a brazen heart! to dare to stake his head and uphold an opinion contrary to that of us all! And he does not tremble to face this peril! Come, it is you who desired it, speak!

## DICAEOPOLIS

Spectators, be not angered if, although I am a beggar, I dare in a comedy to speak before the people of Athens of the public weal; even Comedy can sometimes discern what is right. I shall not please, but I shall say what is true. Besides, Cleon shall not be able to accuse me of attacking Athens before strangers; we are by ourselves at the festival of the Lenææ; the time when our allies send us their tribute and their soldiers is not yet here. There is only the pure wheat without the chaff; as to the resident aliens settled among us, they and the citizens are one, like the straw and the ear.

I detest the Lacedaemonians with all my heart, and may Posidon, the god of Taenarus, cause an earthquake and overturn their dwellings! My vines too have been cut. But come (there are only friends who hear me), why accuse the Laconians of all our woes? Some men (I do not say the city, note particularly that I do not say the city), some wretches, lost in vices, bereft of honour, who were not even citizens of good stamp, but

strangers, have accused the Megarians of introducing their produce fraudulently, and not a cucumber, a leveret, a suckling pig, a clove of garlic, a lump of salt was seen without its being said, "Halloa! these come from Megara," and their being instantly confiscated. Thus far the evil was not serious and we were the only sufferers. But now some young drunkards go to Megara and carry off the harlot Simaetha; the Megarians, hurt to the quick, run off in turn with two harlots of the house of Aspasia; and so for three whores Greece is set ablaze. Then Pericles, aflame with ire on his Olympian height, let loose the lightning, caused the thunder to roll, upset Greece and passed an edict, which ran like the song, "That the Megarians be banished both from our land and from our markets and from the sea and from the continent." Meanwhile the Megarians, who were beginning to die of hunger, begged the Lacedaemonians to bring about the abolition of the decree, of which those harlots were the cause; several times we refused their demand; and from that time there was a horrible clatter of arms everywhere. You will say that Sparta was wrong, but what should she have done? Answer that. Suppose that a Lacedaemonian had seized a little Seriphian dog on any pretext and had sold it, would you have endured it quietly? Far from it, you would at once have sent three hundred vessels to sea, and what an uproar there would have been through all the city! there it's a band of noisy soldiery, here a brawl about the election of a Trierarch; elsewhere pay is being distributed, the Pallas figure-heads are being regilded, crowds are surging under the market porticos, encumbered with wheat that is being measured, wine-skins, oar-leathers, garlic, olives, onions in nets; everywhere are chaplets, sprats, flute-girls, black eyes; in the arsenal bolts are being noisily driven home, sweeps are being made and fitted with leathers; we hear nothing but the sound of whistles, of flutes and fifes to encourage the workers. That is what you assuredly would have done, and would not Telephus have done the same? So I come to my general conclusion; we have no common sense.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Oh! wretch! oh! infamous man! You are naught but a beggar and yet you dare to talk to us like this! you insult their worships the informers!

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

By Posidon! he speaks the truth; he has not lied in a single detail.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

But though it be true, need he say it? But you'll have no great cause to be proud of your insolence!

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Where are you running to? Don't you move; if you strike this man, I shall be at you.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*bursting into song*)

Oh! Lamachus, whose glance flashes lightning, whose plume petrifies thy foes, help! Oh! Lamachus, my friend, the hero of my tribe and all of you, both officers and soldiers, defenders of our walls, come to my aid; else is it all over with me!

(LAMACHUS comes out of his house armed from head to foot.)

## LAMACHUS

Whence comes this cry of battle? where must I bring my aid? where must I sow dread? who wants me to uncase my dreadful Gorgon's head?

## DICAEPOLIS

Oh, Lamachus, great hero! Your plumes and your cohorts terrify me.

## CHORUS-LEADER

This man, Lamachus, incessantly abuses Athens.

## LAMACHUS

You are but a mendicant and you dare to use language of this sort?

## DICAEPOLIS

Oh, brave Lamachus, forgive a beggar who speaks at hazard.

## LAMACHUS

But what have you said? Let us hear.

## DICAEPOLIS

I know nothing about it; the sight of weapons makes me dizzy. Oh! I adjure you, take that fearful Gorgon somewhat farther away.

## LAMACHUS

There.

## DICAEPOLIS

Now place it face downwards on the ground.

## LAMACHUS

It is done.

## DICAEPOLIS

Give me a plume out of your helmet.

## LAMACHUS

Here is a feather.

## DICAEPOLIS

And hold my head while I vomit; the plumes have turned my stomach.



LAMACHUS

Hah! what are you proposing to do? do you want to make yourself vomit with this feather?

DICAEOPOLIS

Is it a feather? what bird's? a braggart's?

LAMACHUS

Hah! I will rip you open.

DICAEOPOLIS

No, no, Lamachus! Violence is out of place here! But as you are so strong, why did you not circumcise me? You have all the tools you need for the operation there.

LAMACHUS

A beggar dares thus address a general!

DICAEOPOLIS

How? Am I a beggar?

LAMACHUS

What are you then?

DICAEOPOLIS

Who am I? A good citizen, not ambitious; a soldier, who has fought well since the outbreak of the war, whereas you are but a vile mercenary.

LAMACHUS

They elected me . . .

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, three cuckoos did! If I have concluded peace, it was disgust that drove me; for I see men with hoary heads in the ranks and young fellows of your age shirking service. Some are in Thrace getting an allowance of three drachmae, such fellows as Tisamenophaenippus and Panurgipparchides. The others are with Chares or in Chaonia, men like Geretothedorus and Diomiazon; there are some of the same kidney, too, at Camarina, at Gela, and at Catagela.

LAMACHUS

They were elected.

DICAEOPOLIS

And why do you always receive your pay, when none of these others ever gets any? Speak, Marilades, you have grey hair; well then, have you ever been entrusted with a mission? See! he shakes his head. Yet he is

an active as well as a prudent man. And you, Anthracyllus or Euphorides or Prinides, have you knowledge of Ecbatana or Chaonia? You say no, do you not? Such offices are good for the son of Coesyra and Lamachus, who, but yesterday ruined with debt, never pay their shot, and whom all their friends avoid as foot passengers dodge the folks who empty their shops out of window.

LAMACHUS

Oh! in freedom's name! are such exaggerations to be borne?

DICAEOPOLIS

Not unless Lamachus gets paid for it.

LAMACHUS

But I propose always to war with the Peloponnesians, both at sea, on land and everywhere to make them tremble, and trounce them soundly.  
(*He goes back into his house.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

For my own part, I make proclamation to all Peloponnesians, Megarians and Boeotians, that to them my markets are open; but I debar Lamachus from entering them.

(*He goes into his house.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Convinced by this man's speech, the folk have changed their view and approve him for having concluded peace. But let us prepare for the recital of the parabasis.

(*The CHORUS moves forward and faces the audience.*)

Never since our poet presented comedies, has he praised himself upon the stage; but, having been slandered by his enemies amongst the volatile Athenians, accused of scoffing at his country and of insulting the people, to-day he wishes to reply and regain for himself the inconstant Athenians. He maintains that he has done much that is good for you; if you no longer allow yourselves to be too much hoodwinked by strangers or seduced by flattery, if in politics you are no longer the ninnies you once were, it is thanks to him. Formerly, when delegates from other cities wanted to deceive you, they had but to style you, "the people crowned with violets," and at the word "violets" you at once sat erect on the tips of your bums. Or if, to tickle your vanity, someone spoke of "rich and sleek Athens," in return for that "sleekness" he would get anything he wanted, because he spoke of you as he would have of anchovies in oil. In cautioning you against such wiles, the poet has done you great service as well as in forcing you to understand what is really the democratic principle. Thus the strangers, who came to pay their tributes, wanted to see this great poet,

who had dared to speak the truth to Athens. And so far has the fame of his boldness reached that one day the Great King, when questioning the Lacedæmonian delegates, first asked them which of the two rival cities was the superior at sea, and then immediately demanded at which it was that the comic poet directed his biting satire. "Happy that city," he added, "if it listens to his counsel; it will grow in power, and its victory is assured." This is why the Lacedæmonians offer you peace, if you will cede them Aegina; not that they care for the isle, but they wish to rob you of your poet. As for you, never lose him, who will always fight for the cause of justice in his comedies; he promises you that his precepts will lead you to happiness, though he uses neither flattery, nor bribery, nor intrigue, nor deceit; instead of loading you with praise, he will point you to the better way. I scoff at Cleon's tricks and plotting; honesty and justice shall fight my cause; never will you find me a political poltroon, a prostitute to the highest bidder.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

I invoke thee, Acharnian Muse, fierce and fell as the devouring fire; sudden as the spark that bursts from the crackling oaken coal when roused by the quickening fan to fry little fishes, while others knead the dough or whip the sharp Thasian pickle with rapid hand, so break forth, my Muse, and inspire thy tribesmen with rough, vigorous, stirring strains.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

We others, now old men and heavy with years, we reproach the city; so many are the victories we have gained for the Athenian fleets that we well deserve to be cared for in our declining life; yet far from this, we are ill-used, harassed with law-suits, delivered over to the scorn of stripling orators. Our minds and bodies being ravaged with age, Posidon should protect us, yet we have no other support than a staff. When standing before the judge, we can scarcely stammer forth the fewest words, and of justice we see but its barest shadow, whereas the accuser, desirous of conciliating the younger men, overwhelms us with his ready rhetoric; he drags us before the judge, presses us with questions, lays traps for us; the onslaught troubles, upsets and ruins poor old Tithonus, who, crushed with age, stands tongue-tied; sentenced to a fine, he weeps, he sobs and says to his friend, "This fine robs me of the last trifle that was to have bought my coffin."

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Is this not a scandal? What! the clepsydra is to kill the white-haired veteran, who, in fierce fighting, has so oft covered himself with glorious sweat, whose valour at Marathon saved the country! We

were the ones who pursued on the field of Marathon, whereas now it is wretches who pursue us to the death and crush us. What would Marpsias reply to this?

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

What an injustice that a man, bent with age like Thucydides, should be brow-beaten by this braggart advocate, Cephisodemus, who is as savage as the Scythian desert he was born in! I wept tears of pity when I saw a Scythian maltreat this old man, who, by Ceres, when he was young and the true Thucydides, would not have permitted an insult from Ceres herself! At that date he would have floored ten orators like Euathlus, he would have terrified three thousand Scythians with his shouts; he would have pierced the whole line of the enemy with his shafts. Ah! but if you will not leave the aged in peace, decree that the advocates be matched; thus the old man will only be confronted with a toothless greybeard, the young will fight with the braggart, the ignoble with the son of Clinias; make a law that in the future, the old man can only be summoned and convicted at the courts by the aged and the young man by the youth.

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out of his house and marking out a square in front of it*)

These are the confines of my market-place. All Peloponnesians, Megarians, Boeotians, have the right to come and trade here, provided they sell their wares to me and not to Lamachus. As market-inspectors I appoint these three whips of Leprean leather, chosen by lot. Warned away are all informers and all men of Phasis. They are bringing me the pillar on which the treaty is inscribed and I shall erect it in the centre of the market, well in sight of all.

(*He goes back into the house just as a Megarian enters from the left, carrying a sack on his shoulder and followed by his two little daughters.*)

MEGARIAN

Hail! market of Athens, beloved of Megarians. Let Zeus, the patron of friendship, witness, I regretted you as a mother mourns her son. Come, poor little daughters of an unfortunate father, try to find something to eat; listen to me with the full heed of an empty belly. Which would you prefer? To be sold or to cry with hunger?

DAUGHTERS

To be sold, to be sold!

MEGARIAN

That is my opinion too. But who would make so sorry a deal as to buy you? Ah! I recall me a Megarian trick; I am going to disguise you as

little porkers, that I am offering for sale. Fit your hands with these hoofs and take care to appear the issue of a sow of good breed, for, if I am forced to take you back to the house, by *Hermes!* you will suffer cruelly of hunger! Then fix on these snouts and cram yourselves into this sack. Forget not to grunt and to say wee-wee like the little pigs that are sacrificed in the Mysteries. I must summon Dicaeopolis. Where is he? (*Loudly*) Dicaeopolis, do you want to buy some nice little porkers?

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out of his house*)

Who are you? a Megarian?

MEGARIAN

I have come to your market.

DICAEOPOLIS

Well, how are things at Megara?

MEGARIAN

We are crying with hunger at our firesides.

DICAEOPOLIS

The fireside is jolly enough with a piper.<sup>7</sup> But what else is doing at Megara?

MEGARIAN

What else? When I left for the market, the authorities were taking steps to let us die in the quickest manner.

DICAEOPOLIS

That is the best way to get you out of all your troubles.

MEGARIAN

True.

DICAEOPOLIS

What other news of Megara? What is wheat selling at?

MEGARIAN

With us it is valued as highly as the very gods in heaven!

DICAEOPOLIS

Is it salt that you are bringing?

MEGARIAN

Aren't you the ones that are holding back the salt? <sup>8</sup>

DICAEOPOLIS

Is it garlic then?

## MEGARIAN

What! garlic! do you not at every raid like mice grub up the ground with your pikes to pull out every single head?

## DICAEOPOLIS

What *are* you bringing then?

## MEGARIAN

Little sows, like those they immolate at the Mysteries."

## DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! very well, show me them.

## MEGARIAN

They are very fine; feel their weight. See! how fat and fine.

DICAEOPOLIS (*feeling around in the sack*)

Hey! what's *this*?

## MEGARIAN

A sow.

## DICAEOPOLIS

A *sow*, you say? Where from, then?

## MEGARIAN

From Megara. What! isn't it a sow then?

DICAEOPOLIS (*feeling around in the sack again*)

No, I don't believe it is.

## MEGARIAN

This is too much! what an incredulous man! He says it's not a sow; but we will stake, if you will, a measure of salt ground up with thyme, that in good Greek this is called a sow and nothing else.

## DICAEOPOLIS

But a sow of the human kind.

## MEGARIAN

Without question, by Diocles! of my own breed! Well! What think you? would you like to hear them squeal?

## DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, I would.

MEGARIAN

Cry quickly, wee sowlet; squeak up, hussy, or by Hermes! I take you back to the house.

DAUGHTERS

Wee-wee, wee-wee!

MEGARIAN

Is that a little sow, or not?

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, it seems so; but let it grow up, and it will be a fine fat thing.

MEGARIAN

In five years it will be just like its mother.

DICAEOPOLIS

But it cannot be sacrificed.

MEGARIAN

And why not?

DICAEOPOLIS

It has no tail.

MEGARIAN

Because it is quite young, but in good time it will have a big one, thick and red. But if you are willing to bring it up you will have a very fine sow.

DICAEOPOLIS

The two are as like as two peas.

MEGARIAN

They are born of the same father and mother; let them be fattened, let them grow their bristles, and they will be the finest sows you can offer to Aphrodité.

DICAEOPOLIS

But sows are not immolated to Aphrodité.

MEGARIAN

Not sows to Aphrodité! Why, she's the only goddess to whom they are offered! the flesh of my sows will be excellent on your spit.

DICAEOPOLIS

Can they eat alone? They no longer need their mother?

MEGARIAN

Certainly not, nor their father.

DICAEPOLIS

What do they like most?

MEGARIAN

Whatever is given them; but ask for yourself.

DICAEPOLIS

Speak! little sow.

DAUGHTERS

Wee-wee, wee-wee!

DICAEPOLIS

Can you eat chick-pease? <sup>10</sup>

DAUGHTERS

Wee-wee, wee-wee, wee-wee!

DICAEPOLIS

And Attic figs?

DAUGHTERS

Wee-wee, wee-wee!

DICAEPOLIS

What sharp squeaks at the name of figs. Come, let some figs be brought for these little pigs. Will they eat them? Goodness! how they munch them, what a grinding of teeth, mighty Heracles! I believe those pigs hail from the land of the Voracians.

MEGARIAN (*aside*)

But they have not eaten all the figs; I took this one myself.

DICAEPOLIS

Ah! what curious creatures! For what sum will you sell them?

MEGARIAN

I will give you one for a bunch of garlic, and the other, if you like, for a quart measure of salt.

DICAEPOLIS

I'll buy them. Wait for me here.

(*He goes into the house.*)



MEGARIAN

The deal is done. Hermes, god of good traders, grant I may sell both my wife and my mother in the same way!

(*An INFORMER enters.*)

INFORMER

Hi! fellow, what country are you from?

MEGARIAN

I am a pig-merchant from Megara.

INFORMER

I shall denounce both your pigs and yourself as public enemies.

MEGARIAN

Ah! here our troubles begin afresh!

INFORMER

Let go of that sack. I'll teach you to talk Megarian!

MEGARIAN (*loudly*)

Dicaeopolis, Dicaeopolis, they want to denounce me.

DICAEPOLIS (*from within*)

Who dares do this thing? (*He comes out of his house.*) Inspectors, drive out the informers. Ah! you offer to enlighten us without a lamp! <sup>11</sup>

INFORMER

What! I may not denounce our enemies?

DICAEPOLIS (*with a threatening gesture*)

Watch out for yourself, and go off pretty quick and denounce elsewhere.

(*The INFORMER runs away.*)

MEGARIAN

What a plague to Athens!

DICAEPOLIS

Be reassured, Megarian. Here is the price for your two sowlets, the garlic and the salt. Farewell and much happiness!

MEGARIAN

Ah! we never have that amongst us.

DICAEPOLIS

Oh, I'm sorry if I said the wrong thing.

## MEGARIAN

Farewell, dear little sows, and seek, far from your father, to munch your bread with salt, if they give you any.

*(He departs and DICAEPOLIS takes the "sows" into his house.)*

CHORUS (*singing*)

Here is a man truly happy. See how everything succeeds to his wish. Peacefully seated in his market, he will earn his living; woe to Ctesias, and all other informers who dare to enter there! You will not be cheated as to the value of wares, you will not again see Prepis wiping his big arse, nor will Cleonymus jostle you; you will take your walks, clothed in a fine tunic, without meeting Hyperbolus and his unceasing quibblings, without being accosted on the public place by any importunate fellow, neither by Cratinus, shaven in the fashion of the adulterers, nor by this musician, who plagues us with his silly improvisations, that hyper-rogue Artemo, with his arm-pits stinking as foul as a goat, like his father before him. You will not be the butt of the villainous Pauson's jeers, nor of Lysistratus, the disgrace of the Cholargian deme, who is the incarnation of all the vices, and endures cold and hunger more than thirty days in the month.

*(A BOEOTIAN enters, followed by his slave, who is carrying a large assortment of articles of food, and by a troop of flute players.)*

## BOEOTIAN

By Heracles! my shoulder is quite black and blue. Ismenias, put the penny-royal down there very gently, and all of you, musicians from Thebes, strike up on your bone flutes "The Dog's Arse."

*(The Musicians immediately begin an atrocious rendition of a vulgar tunc.)*

## DICAEPOLIS

Enough, damn you; get out of here! Rascally hornets, away with you! Whence has sprung this accursed swarm of Chaeris fellows which comes assailing my door?

*(The Musicians depart.)*

## BOEOTIAN

Ah! by Iolas! Drive them off, my dear host, you will please me immensely; all the way from Thebes, they were there piping behind me and they have completely stripped my penny-royal of its blossom. But will you buy anything of me, some chickens or some locusts?

## DICAEPOLIS

Ah! good day, Boeotian, eater of good round loaves. What do you bring?

BOEOTIAN

All that is good in Boeotia, marjoram, penny-royal, rush-mats, lamp-wicks, ducks, jays, woodcocks, water-fowl, wrens, divers.

DICAEPOLIS

A regular hail of birds is beating down on my market.

BOEOTIAN

I also bring geese, hares, foxes, moles, hedgehogs, cats, lyres, martins, otters and eels from the Copaic lake.

DICAEPOLIS

Ah! my friend, you, who bring me the most delicious of fish, let me salute your eels.

BOEOTIAN (*in tragic style*)

Come, thou, the eldest of my fifty Copaic virgins, come and complete the joy of our host.

DICAEPOLIS (*likewise*)

Oh! my well-beloved, thou object of my long regrets, thou art here at last then, thou, after whom the comic poets sigh, thou, who art dear to Morychus. Slaves, hither with the stove and the bellows. Look at this charming eel, that returns to us after six long years of absence. Salute it, my children; as for myself, I will supply coal to do honour to the stranger. Take it into my house; death itself could not separate me from her, if cooked with beet leaves.

BOEOTIAN

And what will you give me in return?

DICAEPOLIS

It will pay for your market dues. And as to the rest, what do you wish to sell me?

BOEOTIAN

Why, everything.

DICAEPOLIS

On what terms? For ready-money or in wares from these parts?

BOEOTIAN

I would take some Athenian produce, that we have not got in Boeotia.

DICAEPOLIS

Phaleric anchovies, pottery?

BOEOTIAN

Anchovies, pottery? But these we have. I want produce that is wanting with us and that is plentiful here.

DICAEPOLIS

Ah! I have the very thing; take away an informer, packed up carefully as crockery-ware.

BOEOTIAN

By the twin gods! I should earn big money, if I took one; I would exhibit him as an ape full of spite.

DICAEPOLIS (*as an informer enters*)

Hah! here we have Nicarchus, who comes to denounce you.

BOEOTIAN

How small he is!

DICAEPOLIS

But all pure evil.

NICARCHUS

Whose are these goods?

DICAEPOLIS

Mine; they come from Boeotia, I call Zeus to witness.

NICARCHUS

I denounce them as coming from an enemy's country.

BOEOTIAN

What! you declare war against birds?

NICARCHUS

And I am going to denounce you too.

BOEOTIAN

What harm have I done you?

NICARCHUS

I will say it for the benefit of those that listen; you introduce lamp-wicks from an enemy's country.

DICAEPOLIS

Then you even denounce a wick.

NICARCHUS

It needs but one to set an arsenal afire.

DICAEOPOLIS

A wick set an arsenal ablaze! But how, great gods?

NICARCHUS

Should a Boeotian attach it to an insect's wing, and, taking advantage of a violent north wind, throw it by means of a tube into the arsenal and the fire once get hold of the vessels, everything would soon be devoured by the flames.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! wretch! an insect and a wick devour everything!

*(He strikes him.)*

NICARCHUS (*to the CHORUS*)

You will bear witness, that he mishandles me.

DICAEOPOLIS (*to the BOEOTIAN*)

Shut his mouth. Give me some hay; I am going to pack him up like a vase, that he may not get broken on the road.

*(The INFORMER is bound and gagged and packed in hay.)*

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Pack up your goods carefully, friend; that the stranger may not break it when taking it away.

DICAEOPOLIS

I shall take great care with it. *(He hits the INFORMER on the head and a stifled cry is heard.)* One would say he is cracked already; he rings with a false note, which the gods abhor.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But what will be done with him?

DICAEOPOLIS

This is a vase good for all purposes; it will be used as a vessel for holding all foul things, a mortar for pounding together law-suits, a lamp for spying upon accounts, and as a cup for the mixing up and poisoning of everything.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

None could ever trust a vessel for domestic use that has such a ring about it.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh! it is strong, my friend, and will never get broken, if care is taken to hang it head downwards.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to the BOEOTIAN*)

There! it is well packed now!

BOEOTIAN

Well then, I will proceed to carry off my bundle.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Farewell, worthiest of strangers, take this informer, good for anything, and fling him where you like.

DICAEOPOLIS

Bah! this rogue has given me enough trouble to pack! Here! Boeotian, pick up your pottery.

BOEOTIAN

Stoop, Ismenias, that I may put it on your shoulder, and be very careful with it.

DICAEOPOLIS

You carry nothing worth having; however, take it, for you will profit by your bargain; the informers will bring you luck.

(*The BOEOTIAN and his slave depart; DICAEPOLIS goes into his house; a slave comes out of LAMACHUS' house.*)

SLAVE

Dicaeopolis!

DICAEOPOLIS (*from within*)

What's the matter? Why are you calling me?

SLAVE

Lamachus wants to keep the Feast of Cups, and I come by his order to bid you one drachma for some thrushes and three more for a Copiac eel.

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out*)

And who is this Lamachus, who demands an eel?

SLAVE (*in tragic style*)

He is the terrible, indefatigable Lamachus, who is always brandishing his fearful Gorgon's head and the three plumes which o'ershadow his helmet.

DICAEOPOLIS

No, no, he will get nothing, even though he gave me his buckler. Let him eat salt fish while he shakes his plumes, and, if he comes here making any din, I shall call the inspectors. As for myself, I shall take away all these goods; (*in tragic style*) I go home on thrushes' wings and black-birds' pinions. (*He goes into his house.*)

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

You see, citizens, you see the good fortune which this man owes to his prudence, to his profound wisdom. You see how, since he has concluded peace, he buys what is useful in the household and good to eat hot. All good things flow towards him unsought. Never will I welcome the god of war in *my* house; never shall *he* sing the "Harmodius" at my table; he is a sot, who comes feasting with those who are overflowing with good things and brings all manner of mischief in his train. He overthrows, ruins, rips open; it is vain to make him a thousand offers, to say "be seated, pray, and drink this cup, proffered in all friendship"; he burns our vine-stocks and brutally spills on the ground the wine from our vineyards.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

This man, on the other hand, covers his table with a thousand dishes; proud of his good fortunes, he has had these feathers cast before his door to show us how he lives. (*A woman appears, bearing the attributes of Peace.*) Oh, Peace! companion of fair Aphrodité and of the sweet Graces, how charming are thy features and yet I never knew it! Would that Eros might join me to thee, Eros crowned with roses as Zeuxis shows him to us! Do I seem somewhat old to thee? I am yet able to make thee a threefold offering; despite my age I could plant a long row of vines for you; then beside these some tender cuttings from the fig; finally a young vine-stock, loaded with fruit, and all around the field olive trees, to furnish us with oil wherewith to anoint us both at the New Moons.

(*A HERALD enters*)

## HERALD

Oyez, oyez! As was the custom of your forebears, empty a full pitcher of wine at the call of the trumpet; he who first sees the bottom shall get a wine-skin as round and plump as Ctesiphon's belly.

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out of the house; to his family within*)

Women, children, have you not heard? Faith! do you not heed the herald? Quick! let the hares boil and roast merrily; keep them turning; withdraw them from the flame, prepare the chaplets; reach me the skewers that I may spit the thrushes.

## LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

I envy you your wisdom and even more your good cheer.

## DICAEOPOLIS

What then will you say when you see the thrushes roasting?

## LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Ah! true indeed!

## DICAEPOLIS

Slave! stir up the fire.

## LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

See, how he knows his business, what a perfect cook! How well he understands the way to prepare a good dinner!

(A HUSBANDMAN enters in haste.)

## HUSBANDMAN

Ah! woe is me!

## DICAEPOLIS

Heracles! What have we here?

## HUSBANDMAN

A most miserable man.

## DICAEPOLIS

Keep your misery for yourself.

## HUSBANDMAN

Ah! friend! since you alone are enjoying peace, grant me a part of your truce, were it but five years.

## DICAEPOLIS

What has happened to you?

## HUSBANDMAN

I am ruined; I have lost a pair of steers.

## DICAEPOLIS

How?

## HUSBANDMAN

The Boeotians seized them at Phylé.

## DICAEPOLIS

Ah! poor wretch! and do you still wear white?

## HUSBANDMAN

Their dung made my wealth.

## DICAEPOLIS

What can I do in the matter?



## HUSBANDMAN

Crying for my beasts has lost me my eyesight. Ah! if you care for poor Dercetes of Phylé, anoint mine eyes quickly with your balm of peace.

## DICAEPOLIS

But, my poor fellow, I do not practise medicine.

## HUSBANDMAN

Come, I adjure you; perhaps I shall recover my steers.

## DICAEPOLIS

Impossible; away, go and whine to the disciples of Pittalus.

## HUSBANDMAN

Grant me but one drop of peace; pour it into this little reed.

## DICAEPOLIS

No, not a particle; go and weep somewhere else.

HUSBANDMAN (*as he departs*)

Oh! oh! oh! my poor beasts!

## LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

This man has discovered the sweetest enjoyment in peace; he will share it with none.

DICAEPOLIS (*to a slave*)

Pour honey over this tripe; set it before the fire to dry.

## LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

What lofty tones he uses! Did you hear him?

DICAEPOLIS (*to the slaves inside the house*)

Get the eels on the gridiron!

## LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

You are killing me with hunger; your smoke is choking your neighbours, and you split our ears with your bawling.

## DICAEPOLIS

Have this fried and let it be nicely browned.

(*He goes back into the house. A WEDDING GUEST enters, carrying a package.*)

## WEDDING GUEST

Dicaeopolis! Dicaeopolis!

## DICAEPOLIS

Who are you?

## WEDDING GUEST

A young bridegroom sends you these viands from the marriage feast.

## DICAEPOLIS

Whoever he be, I thank him.

## WEDDING GUEST

And in return, he prays you to pour a glass of peace into this vase, that he may not have to go to the front and may stay at home to make love to his young wife.

## DICAEPOLIS

Take back, take back your viands; for a thousand drachmae I would not give a drop of peace. (*A young woman enters*) But who is she?

## WEDDING GUEST

She is the matron of honour; she wants to say something to you from the bride privately.

## DICAEPOLIS

Come, what do you wish to say? (*The MATRON OF HONOUR whispers in his ear.*) Ah! what a ridiculous demand! The bride burns with longing to keep her husband's tool at home. Come! bring hither my truce; to her alone will I give some of it, for she is a woman, and, as such, should not suffer under the war. Here, friend, hand me your vial. And as to the manner of applying this balm, tell the bride, when a levy of soldiers is made, to rub some in bed on her husband, where most needed. (*The MATRON OF HONOUR and the WEDDING GUEST depart.*) There, slave, take away my truce! Now, quick, bring me the wine-flagon, that I may fill up the drinking bowls!

(*The slave leaves. A HERALD enters.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*in tragic style*)

I see a man, "striding along apace, with knitted brows; he seems to us the bearer of terrible tidings."

HERALD (*in tragic style*)

Oh! toils and battles and Lamachuses!

(*He knocks on LAMACHUS' door.*)

LAMACHUS (*from within; in tragic style*)

What noise resounds around my dwelling, where shines the glint of arms.

(*He comes out of his house.*)

## HERALD

The Generals order you forthwith to take your battalions and your plumes, and, despite the snow, to go and guard our borders. They have learnt that a band of Boeotians intend taking advantage of the Feast of Cups to invade our country.

## LAMACHUS

Ah! the Generals! they are numerous, but not good for much! It's cruel, not to be able to enjoy the feast!

## DICAEPOLIS

Oh! warlike host of Lamachus!

## LAMACHUS

Wretch! do you dare to jeer me?

## DICAEPOLIS

Do you want to fight this four-winged Geryon?

## LAMACHUS

Oh! oh! what fearful tidings!

## DICAEPOLIS

Ah! ah! I see another herald running up; what news does he bring me?  
(*Another HERALD enters.*)

## HERALD

Dicaeopolis!

## DICAEPOLIS

What is the matter?

## HERALD

Come quickly to the feast and bring your basket and your cup; it is the priest of Bacchus who invites you. But hasten, the guests have been waiting for you a long while. All is ready—couches, tables, cushions, chaplets, perfumes, dainties and whores to boot; biscuits, cakes, sesamé-bread, tarts, lovely dancing women, and the "Harmodius." But come with all speed.

## LAMACHUS

Oh! hostile gods!

## DICAEPOLIS

This is not astounding; you have chosen this great ugly Gorgon's head for your patron. (*To a slave*) You, shut the door, and let someone get ready the meal.

LAMACHUS

Slave! slave! my knapsack!

DICAEPOLIS

Slave! slave! a basket!

LAMACHUS

Take salt and thyme, slave, and don't forget the onions.

DICAEPOLIS

Get some fish for me; I cannot bear onions.

LAMACHUS

Slave, wrap me up a little stale salt meat in a fig-leaf.

DICAEPOLIS

And for me some nice fat tripe in a fig-leaf; I will have it cooked here.

LAMACHUS

Bring me the plumes for my helmet.

DICAEPOLIS

Bring me wild pigeons and thrushes.

LAMACHUS

How white and beautiful are these ostrich feathers!

DICAEPOLIS

How fat and well browned is the flesh of this wood-pigeon!

LAMACHUS (*to DICAEPOLIS*)

My friend, stop scoffing at my armour.

DICAEPOLIS (*to LAMACHUS*)

My friend, stop staring at my thrushes.

LAMACHUS (*to his slave*)

Bring me the case for my triple plume.

DICAEPOLIS (*to his slave*)

Pass me over that dish of hare.

LAMACHUS

Alas! the moths have eaten the hair of my crest.

DICAEPOLIS

Shall I eat my hare before dinner?

LAMACHUS

My friend, will you kindly not speak to me?

DICAEPOLIS

I'm not speaking to you; I'm scolding my slave. (*To the slave*) Shall we wager and submit the matter to Lamachus, which of the two is the best to eat, a locust or a thrush?

LAMACHUS

Insolent hound!

DICAEPOLIS

He much prefers the locusts.

LAMACHUS

Slave, unhook my spear and bring it to me.

DICAEPOLIS

Slave, slave, take the sausage from the fire and bring it to me.

LAMACHUS

Come, let me draw my spear from its sheath. Hold it, slave, hold it tight.

DICAEPOLIS

And you, slave, grip well hold of the skewer.

LAMACHUS

Slave, the bracings for my shield.

DICAEPOLIS

Pull the loaves out of the oven and bring me these bracings of my stomach.

LAMACHUS

My round buckler with the Gorgon's head.

DICAEPOLIS

My round cheese-cake.

LAMACHUS

What clumsy wit!

DICAEPOLIS

What delicious cheese-cake!

LAMACHUS

Pour oil on the buckler. Hah! hah! I can see reflected there an old man who will be accused of cowardice.

DICAEOPOLIS

Pour honey on the cake. Hah! hah! I can see an old man who makes Lamachus of the Gorgon's head weep with rage.

LAMACHUS

Slave, full war armour.

DICAEOPOLIS

Slave, my beaker; that is *my* armour.

LAMACHUS

With this I hold my ground with any foe.

DICAEOPOLIS

And I with this in any drinking bout.

LAMACHUS

Fasten the strappings to the buckler.

DICAEOPOLIS

Pack the dinner well into the basket.

LAMACHUS

Personally I shall carry the knapsack.

DICAEOPOLIS

Personally I shall carry the cloak.

LAMACHUS

Slave, take up the buckler and let's be off. It is snowing! God help us! A wintry business!

DICAEOPOLIS

Take up the basket, mine's a festive business.

*(They depart in opposite directions.)*

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We wish you both joy on your journeys, which differ so much. One goes to mount guard and freeze, while the other will drink, crowned with flowers, and then lie with a young beauty till he gets his tool all sore.

CHORUS (*singing*)

I say it freely; may Zeus confound Antimachus, the poet-historian, the son of Psacas! When Choregus at the Lenaea, alas! alas!

he dismissed me dinnerless. May I see him devouring with his eyes a cuttle-fish, just served, well cooked, hot and properly salted; and the moment that he stretches his hand to help himself, may a dog seize it and run off with it. Such is my first wish. I also hope for him a misfortune at night. That returning all-fevered from horse practice, he may meet an Orestes, mad with drink, who will crack him over the head; that wishing to seize a stone, he, in the dark, may pick up a fresh turd, hurl, miss him and hit Cratinus.

(*The slave of LAMACHUS enters.*)

SLAVE OF LAMACHUS (*knocking on the door of LAMACHUS' house, in tragic style*)

Captives present within the house of Lamachus, water, water in a little pot! Make it warm, get ready cloths, cerate, greasy wool and bandages for his ankle. In leaping a ditch, the master has hurt himself against a stake; he has dislocated and twisted his ankle, broken his head by falling on a stone, while his Gorgon shot far away from his buckler. His mighty braggadocio plume rolled on the ground; at this sight he uttered these doleful words, "Radiant star, I gaze on thee for the last time; my eyes close to all light, I die." Having said this, he falls into the water, gets out again, meets some runaways and pursues the robbers with his spear at their backsides. But here he comes, himself. Get the door open.

(*In this final scene all the lines are sung*)

LAMACHUS (*limping in with the help of two soldiers and singing a song of woe*)

Oh! heavens! oh! heavens! What cruel pain! I faint, I tremble! Alas! I die! the foe's lance has struck me! But what would hurt me most would be for Dicaeopolis to see me wounded thus and laugh at my ill-fortune.

DICAEOPOLIS (*enters with two courtesans, singing gaily*)

Oh! my gods! what breasts! Swelling like quinces! Come, my treasures, give me voluptuous kisses! Glue your lips to mine. Haha! I was the first to empty my cup.

LAMACHUS

Oh! cruel fate! how I suffer! accursed wounds!

DICAEOPOLIS

Hah! hah! Hail! Lamachippus!

LAMACHUS

Woe is me!

DICAEPOLIS (*to the one girl*)

Why do you kiss me?

LAMACHUS

Ah, wretched me!

DICAEPOLIS (*to the other girl*)

And why do you bite me?

LAMACHUS

'Twas a cruel score I was paying back!

DICAEPOLIS

Scores are not evened at the Feast of Cups!

LAMACHUS

Oh! Oh! Paean, Paean!

DICAEPOLIS

But to-day is not the feast of Paean.

LAMACHUS (*to the soldiers*)

Oh! take hold of my leg, do; ah! hold it tenderly, my friends!

DICAEPOLIS (*to the girls*)

And you, my darlings, take hold of my tool, both of you!

LAMACHUS

This blow with the stone makes me dizzy; my sight grows dim.

DICAEPOLIS

For myself, I want to get to bed; I've got an erection and I want to make love in the dark.

LAMACHUS

Carry me to the surgeon Pittalus. Put me in his healing hands!

DICAEPOLIS

Take me to the judges. Where is the king of the feast? The wine-skin is mine!

LAMACHUS (*as he is being carried away*)

That spear has pierced my bones; what torture I endure!



DICAEOPOLIS (*to the audience*)

You see this empty cup! I triumph! I triumph!

CHORUS

Old man, I come at your bidding! You triumph! you triumph!

DICAEOPOLIS

Again I have brimmed my cup with unmixed wine and drained it at a draught!

CHORUS

You triumph then, brave champion; thine is the wine-skin!

DICAEOPOLIS

Follow me, singing "Triumph! Triumph!"

CHORUS

Aye! we will sing of thee, thee and thy sacred wine-skin, and we all, as we follow thee, will repeat in thine honour, "Triumph, Triumph!"

## NOTES FOR THE ACHARNIANS

1. Such was the esteem in which Aeschylus was held by his countrymen that even after his death it was especially decreed that his plays might be produced at the dramatic festivals, which otherwise were devoted exclusively to new compositions, and he is reported to have won several posthumous victories on such occasions.

2. The Athenian democracy presupposed a maximum of popular participation in the business of government, just as the Socialist democracy of the Soviet Union does today, and it is interesting to discover that in ancient times also certain special efforts had to be made to overcome human indolence and apathy in political matters. So many Athenians preferred the bustle of the market-place to the solemnity of the Assembly that it was customary to round up the dilatory with a long and freshly reddened rope; fines for tardiness would then be imposed on all who exhibited the telltale vermilion stripe.

3. The ingenuity of scholarship has yet to extract a satisfactory or apposite meaning from this jargon. Such passages usually mean something in Aristophanes, and the second speech of Pseudartabas is, as Dicaeopolis remarks, clear enough, but this line may be nothing more than a sample of what Persian sounded like to a Greek. The accents indicate the metre.

4. Many Athenians seem to have been as ready to leave, as they were reluctant to attend, the Assembly, and adjournment must occasionally have been effected on somewhat flimsy grounds.

5. While carrying out the comparison between truce-tasting and wine sampling, Aristophanes manages to convey his views on what sort of peace ought to be made; one of five years' duration would be merely a breathing spell for an armaments race, and one of ten would only give additional time for the conclusion of military alliances.

6. Aristophanes never tires of twitting Euripides with the fact or fancy that his mother had sold vegetables.

7. Dicaeopolis has misunderstood the Megarian, taking *peinames*, "we starve" for *pinomes*, "we drink"; hence his apparently inappropriate reply.

8. At this time the Athenians had possession of the island of Minoa off the Megarian coast; they were thus able to intercept all her maritime commerce, and they incidentally controlled her salt-works also.

9. This brilliant scene is a riotous tissue of plays on the double meaning of the Greek word *choiros*, which signifies not only "sow" but also "female genitalia." The English word "pussy" has comparable senses, but is regrettably ill-adapted to the needs of this particular scene, which must thus remain the Hellenist's delight and the translator's despair.

10. Here we find a pun similar to that on *choiros*, for the word *crebithos* means both "chick-pea" and "penis"; the remark about figs in the next line seems also to contain such a *double entendre*.

11. This remark is a pun on the word *phaincin*, which means both "to light" and "to inform against."

## II

# THE KNIGHTS

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

DEMOSTHENES

NICIAS

AGORACRITUS, *a Sausage-Seller*

CLEON

DEMOS

CHORUS OF KNIGHTS

## INTRODUCTION

JUST a year after the success of *The Acharnians*, at the Lenaea of 424, Aristophanes, under his own name, produced *The Knights* and was again victorious, this time with what is very nearly the poorest of the eleven comedies that have come down to us. In sharp contrast with the gay variety of *The Acharnians*, *The Knights* is sadly deficient in amusing incidents and all too liberally endowed with political and uncomic hate. Primarily and essentially a vitriolic attack on the demagogue Cleon, who but a few months previously had returned in triumph from Sphacteria and was now at the height of his powers, the play is a greater tribute to its author's courage and sincerity than to his art and taste. As a work of literature rather than as an historical and biographical document, perhaps the best that can be said in its favour is that it contributes materially to our knowledge of the formal and metrical structure of the Agon.

The opening scene introduces us to the amorphous characters and harassed situation of Demosthenes and Nicias, two faithful servants of Demos, who personifies the Athenian people. In a long speech addressed to the spectators Demosthenes explains that the chief cause of his distress is a recent addition to Demos' household, "a Paphlagonian tanner, an arrant rogue, the incarnation of calumny." This domineering and dishonest slave has rendered life intolerable for the others, and it is imperative that he be got rid of immediately. An oracle filched from his great collection reveals that the tanner is to be succeeded by a sausage-seller, and no sooner is this prophecy disclosed than just such a merchant appears and is astonished to find himself hailed as the saviour of Athens.

In a little while the Paphlagonian emerges from the house and the still bewildered sausage-seller is about to beat a hasty retreat, but Demosthenes summons the Knights to his rescue and the Chorus is thus introduced. Their vigorous attack on Cleon rallies the sausage-seller's ebbing spirits and a loud contest of vulgar denigration ensues between him and the tanner. This culminates in the decision of both combatants to go to the Senate in order to test in practice their demagogic talents. Their departure leaves the stage to the Chorus and the parabasis is now delivered.

The anapests explain why Aristophanes had hitherto concealed his identity beneath pseudonyms, and in the course of this pronounce a number of interesting animadversions on the precariousness of the comic poet's profession. The ode invokes and celebrates the god Posidon. The epirrheme extolls the courage of the earlier Athens and proclaims the patriotic devotion of the Knights. In the antode the Chorus calls to its aid Athene, the patron goddess of the city. The antepirrheme praises the Knights in a discreet and indirect fashion by lauding the valour and the exploits of their steeds.

At the conclusion of the parabasis the sausage-seller returns in triumph to announce and to narrate his victory over the Senate. As soon as he has done this the Paphlagonian arrives, bursting with fury and not yet willing to admit that the other is clearly his master in the very game in which he specializes. In accord with normal Athenian legislative procedure the decision is now put to the sovereign people, and Demos is summoned from his home to the Pnyx, where he listens gladly and proudly to the extravagant protestations of devotion made by the Paphlagonian and the sausage-seller. At long last the latter emerges triumphant and the tanner retires in utter confusion. Agoracritus, for the sausage-seller's name is now finally revealed, goes with Demos into his house and the Chorus delivers a sort of second parabasis, a passage filled with singular obscenity and personal vituperation. After this Agoracritus comes out of the house followed by a rejuvenated Demos, who intends to reestablish the pristine discipline of Athens.

Thus ends a comedy at once brave and bad, in which, however, the braveness does not quite compensate for the badness; Aristophanes is so eager to attack the detested Cleon that he neglects to write a real comedy. From Euripides to Odets this is what has always happened when the playwright is so misguided as to become primarily the propagandist. Aristophanes allows his hatred of Cleon to betray him into a surprisingly large number of inconsistencies and lapses of artistic restraint, and the fact that the play was crowned with the first prize may be variously attributed to the inferior merit of the comedies with which it competed, to popular participation in the author's political views, or to the admiration with which his obvious courage may have inspired the spectators; in any case the victory of *The Knights*, like the failure of *The Birds* a decade later, clearly demonstrates the whimsical instability and the dubious value of the vulgar taste.

## THE KNIGHTS

(SCENE:—*The Orchestra represents the Pnyx at Athens; in the background is the house of DEMOS.*)

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! alas! alas! Oh! woe! oh! woe! Miserable Paphlagonian! may the gods destroy both him and his cursed advice! Since that evil day when this new slave entered the house he has never ceased belabouring us with blows.

NICIAS

May the plague seize him, the arch-fiend—him and his lying tales!

DEMOSTHENES

Hah! my poor fellow, what is your condition?

NICIAS

Very wretched, just like your own.

DEMOSTHENES

Then come, let us sing a duet of groans in the style of Olympus.

DEMOSTHENES AND NICIAS

Boo, hoo! boo, hoo! boo, hoo! boo, hoo! boo, hoo! boo, hoo!!

DEMOSTHENES

Bah! it's lost labour to weep! Enough of groaning! Let us consider how to save our pelts.

NICIAS

But how to do it! Can you suggest anything?

DEMOSTHENES

No, you begin. I cede you the honour.

NICIAS

By Apollo! no, not I. Come, have courage! Speak, and then I will say what I think.



DEMOSTHENES (*in tragic style*)

"Ah! would you but tell me what I should tell you!"

NICIAS

I dare not. How could I express my thoughts with the pomp of Euripides?

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! please spare me! Do not pelt me with those vegetables,<sup>1</sup> but find some way of leaving our master.

NICIAS

Well, then! Say "Let-us-bolt," like this, in one breath.

DEMOSTHENES

I follow you—"Let-us-bolt."

NICIAS

Now after "Let-us-bolt" say "at-top-speed!"

DEMOSTHENES

"At-top-speed!"

NICIAS

Splendid! Just as if you were masturbating; first slowly, "Let-us-bolt"; then quick and firmly, "at-top-speed!"

DEMOSTHENES

Let-us-bolt, let-us-bolt-at-top-speed!

NICIAS

Hah! does that not please you?

DEMOSTHENES

Yes, indeed, yet I fear your omen bodes no good to my hide.

NICIAS

How so?

DEMOSTHENES

Because masturbation chafes the skin.

NICIAS

The best thing we can do for the moment is to throw ourselves at the feet of the statue of some god.

DEMOSTHENES

Of which statue? Any statue? Do you then believe there are gods?

NICIAS

Certainly.

DEMOSTHENES

What proof have you?

NICIAS

The proof that they have taken a grudge against me. Is that not enough?

DEMOSTHENES

I'm convinced it is. But to pass on. Do you consent to my telling the spectators of our troubles?

NICIAS

There's nothing wrong with that, and we might ask them to show us by their manner, whether our facts and actions are to their liking.

DEMOSTHENES

I will begin then. We have a very brutal master, a perfect glutton for beans, and most bad-tempered; it's Demos of the Pnyx, an intolerable old man and half deaf. The beginning of last month he bought a slave, a Paphlagonian tanner, an arrant rogue, the incarnation of calumny. This man of leather knows his old master thoroughly; he plays the fawning cur, flatters, cajoles, wheedles, and dupes him at will with little scraps of leavings, which he allows him to get. "Dear Demos," he will say, "try a single case and you will have done enough; then take your bath, eat, swallow and devour; here are three obols." Then the Paphlagonian filches from one of us what we have prepared and makes a present of it to our old man. The other day I had just kneaded a Spartan cake at Pylos, the cunning rogue came behind my back, sneaked it and offered the cake, which was my invention, in his own name. He keeps us at a distance and suffers none but himself to wait upon the master; when Demos is dining, he keeps close to his side with a thong in his hand and puts the orators to flight. He keeps singing oracles to him, so that the old man now thinks of nothing but the Sibyl. Then, when he sees him thoroughly obfuscated, he uses all his cunning and piles up lies and calumnies against the household; then we are scourged and the Paphlagonian runs about among the slaves to demand contributions with threats and gathers them in with both hands. He will say, "You see how I have had Hylas beaten! Either content me or die at once!" We are forced to give, for otherwise the old man tramples on us and makes us crap forth all our body contains. (*To NICIAS*) There must be an end to it, friend. Let us see! what can be done? Who will get us out of this mess?

NICIAS

The best thing, friend, is our famous "Let-us-bolt!"

DEMOSTHENES

But none can escape the Paphlagonian, his eye is everywhere. And what a stride! He has one leg on Pylos and the other in the Assembly; his arse gapes exactly over the land of the Chaonians, his hands are with the Aetolians and his mind with the Clodians.

NICIAS

It's best then to die; but let us seek the most heroic death.

DEMOSTHENES

Let me think, what *is* the most heroic?

NICIAS

Let us drink the blood of a bull; that's the death Themistocles chose.

DEMOSTHENES

No, not that, but a bumper of good unmixed wine in honour of the Good Genius; perchance we may stumble on a happy thought.

NICIAS

Look at him! "Unmixed wine!" Your mind is on drink intent? Can a man strike out a brilliant thought when drunk?

DEMOSTHENES

Without question. Go, ninny, blow yourself out with water; do you dare to accuse wine of clouding the reason? Quote me more marvellous effects than those of wine. Look! when a man drinks, he is rich, everything he touches succeeds, he gains lawsuits, is happy and helps his friends. Come, bring hither quick a flagon of wine, that I may soak my brain and get an ingenious idea.

NICIAS

My God! What can your drinking do to help us?

DEMOSTHENES

Much. But bring it to me, while I take my seat. Once drunk, I shall strew little ideas, little phrases, little reasonings everywhere.  
(NICIAS *enters the house and returns almost immediately with a bottle.*)

NICIAS

It is lucky I was not caught in the house stealing the wine.

DEMOSTHENES

Tell me, what is the Paphlagonian doing now?

NICIAS

The wretch has just gobbled up some confiscated cakes; he is drunk and lies at full-length snoring on his hides.

DEMOSTHENES

Very well, come along, pour me out wine and plenty of it.

NICIAS

Take it and offer a libation to your Good Genius.

DEMOSTHENES (*to himself*)

Inhale, ah, inhale the spirit of the genius of Pramnium. (*He drinks. Inspiredly*) Ah! Good Genius, thine the plan, not mine!

NICIAS

Tell me, what is it?

DEMOSTHENES

Run indoors quick and steal the oracles of the Paphlagonian, while he is asleep.

NICIAS

Bless me! I fear this Good Genius will be but a very Bad Genius for me.  
(*He goes into the house.*)

DEMOSTHENES

And I'll set the flagon near me, that I may moisten my wit to invent some brilliant notion.

(*Nicias enters the house and returns at once.*)

NICIAS

How loudly the Paphlagonian farts and snores! I was able to seize the sacred oracle, which he was guarding with the greatest care, without his seeing me.

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! clever fellow! Hand it here, that I may read. Come, pour me out some drink, bestir yourself! Let me see what there is in it. Oh! prophecy! Some drink! some drink! Quick!

NICIAS

Well! what says the oracle?

DEMOSTHENES

Pour again.

NICIAS

Is "pour again" in the oracle?

DEMOSTHENES

Oh, Bacis!

NICIAS

But what is in it?

DEMOSTHENES

Quick! some drink!

NICIAS

Bacis is very dry!

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! miserable Paphlagonian! This then is why you have so long taken such precautions; your horoscope gave you qualms of terror.

NICIAS

What does it say?

DEMOSTHENES

It says here how he must end

NICIAS

And how?

DEMOSTHENES

How? the oracle announces clearly that a dealer in oakum must first govern the city.<sup>2</sup>

NICIAS

That's one tradesman. And after him, who?

DEMOSTHENES

After him, a sheep-dealer.

NICIAS

Two tradesmen, eh? And what is this one's fate?

DEMOSTHENES

To reign until a filthier scoundrel than he arises; then he perishes and in his place the leather-seller appears, the Paphlagonian robber, the bawler, who roars like a torrent.

NICIAS

And the leather-seller must destroy the sheep-seller?

## DEMOSTHENES

Yes.

## NICIAS

Oh! woe is me! Where can another seller be found, is there ever a one left?

## DEMOSTHENES

There is yet one, who plies a first-rate trade.

## NICIAS

Tell me, pray, what is that?

## DEMOSTHENES

You really want to know?

## NICIAS

Yes.

## DEMOSTHENES

Well then! it's a sausage-seller who must overthrow him.

## NICIAS

A sausage-seller! Ah! by Posidon! what a fine trade! But where can this man be found?

## DEMOSTHENES

Let's seek him. But look! there he is, going towards the market-place: 'tis the gods, the gods who send him! (*Calling out*) This way, this way, oh, lucky sausage-seller, come forward, dear friend, our saviour, the saviour of our city.

(*Enter AGORACRITUS, a seller of sausages, carrying a basket of his wares.*)

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

What is it? Why do you call me?

## DEMOSTHENES

Come here, come and learn about your good luck, you who are Fortune's favourite!

## NICIAS

Come! Relieve him of his basket-tray and tell him the oracle of the god; I will go and look after the Paphlagonian.

(*He goes into the house*)

## DEMOSTHENES

First put down all your gear, then worship the earth and the gods

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Done. What is the matter?

DEMOSTHENES

Happiness, riches, power; to-day you have nothing, to-morrow you will have all, oh! chief of happy Athens.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Why not leave me to wash my tripe and to sell my sausages instead of making game of me?

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! the fool! Your tripe! Do you see these tiers of people?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Yes.

DEMOSTHENES

You shall be master to them all, governor of the market, of the harbours, of the Pnyx; you shall trample the Senate under foot, be able to cashier the generals, load them with fetters, throw them into gaol, and you will fornicate in the Prytaneum.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What! I?

DEMOSTHENES

You, without a doubt. But you do not yet see all the glory awaiting you. Stand on your basket and look at all the islands that surround Athens.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I see them. What then?

DEMOSTHENES

Look at the stor:chouses and the shipping.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Yes, I am looking.

DEMOSTHENES

Exists there a mortal more blest than you? Furthermore, turn your right eye towards Caria and your left toward Carthage!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Then it's a blessing to be cock-eyed!

DEMOSTHENES

No, but you are the one who is going to trade away all this. According to the oracle you must become the greatest of men.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Just tell me how a sausage-seller can become a great man.

DEMOSTHENES

That is precisely why you will be great, because you are a sad rascal without shame, no better than a common market rogue.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I do not hold myself worthy of wielding power.

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! by the gods! Why do you not hold yourself worthy? Have you then such a good opinion of yourself? Come, are you of honest parentage?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

By the gods! No! of very bad indeed.

DEMOSTHENES

Spoilt child of fortune, everything fits together to ensure your greatness.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

But I have not had the least education. I can only read, and that very badly.

DEMOSTHENES

That is what may stand in your way, almost knowing how to read. A demagogue must be neither an educated nor an honest man; he has to be an ignoramus and a rogue. But do not, do not let go this gift, which the oracle promises.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

But what does the oracle say?

DEMOSTHENES

Faith, it is put together in very fine enigmatical style, as elegant as it is clear: "When the eagle-tanner with the hooked claws shall seize a stupid dragon, a blood-sucker, it will be an end to the hot Paphlagonian pickled garlic. The god grants great glory to the sausage-sellers unless they prefer to sell their wares."

SAUSAGE-SELLER

In what way does this concern me? Please instruct my ignorance.



## DEMOSTHENES

The eagle-tanner is the Paphlagonian.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

What do the hooked claws mean?

## DEMOSTHENES

It means to say, that he robs and pillages us with his claw-like hands.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And the dragon?

## DEMOSTHENES

That is quite clear. The dragon is long and so also is the sausage; the sausage like the dragon is a drinker of blood. Therefore the oracle says, that the dragon will triumph over the eagle-tanner, if he does not let himself be cajoled with words.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

The oracles of the gods flatter me! Faith! I do not at all understand how I can be capable of governing the people.

## DEMOSTHENES

Nothing simpler. Continue your trade. Mix and knead together all the state business as you do for your sausages. To win the people, always cook them some savoury that pleases them. Besides, you possess all the attributes of a demagogue; a screeching, horrible voice, a perverse, cross-grained nature and the language of the market-place. In you all is united which is needful for governing. The oracles are in your favour, even including that of Delphi. Come, take a chaplet, offer a libation to the god of Stupidity and take care to fight vigorously.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Who will be my ally? for the rich fear the Paphlagonian and the poor shudder at the sight of him.

## DEMOSTHENES

You will have a thousand brave Knights, who detest him, on your side; also the honest citizens amongst the spectators, those who are men of brave hearts, and finally myself and the god. Fear not, you will not see his features, for none have dared to make a mask resembling him. But the public have wit enough to recognize him.

NICIAS (*from within*)<sup>4</sup>

Oh! mercy! here comes the Paphlagonian!

(CLEON *rushes out of the house.*)

## CLEON

By the twelve gods! Woe betide you, who have too long been conspiring against Demos. What means this Chalcidian cup? No doubt you are provoking the Chalcidians to revolt. You shall be killed and butchered, you brace of rogues.

DEMOSTHENES (*to the SAUSAGE-SELLER*)

What! are you for running away? Come, come, stand firm, bold Sausage-seller, do not betray us. To the rescue, oh, Knights. Now is the time. Simon, Panaetius, get you to the right wing; they are coming on; hold tight and return to the charge. I can see the dust of their horses' hoofs; they are galloping to our aid. (*To the SAUSAGE-SELLER*) Courage! Attack him, put him to flight.

(*The CHORUS OF KNIGHTS enters at top speed.*)

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Strike, strike the villain, who has spread confusion amongst the ranks of the Knights, this public robber, this yawning gulf of plunder, this devouring Charybdis, this villain, this villain, this villain! I cannot say the word too often, for he *is* a villain a thousand times a day. Come, strike, drive, hurl him over and crush him to pieces; hate him as we hate him; stun him with your blows and your shouts. And beware lest he escape you; he knows the way Eucrates took straight to a bran sack for concealment.

## CLEON

Oh! veteran Heliasts, brotherhood of the three obols, whom I fostered by bawling at random, help me; I am being beaten to death by rebels.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And justly too; you devour the public funds that all should share in; you treat the treasury officials like the fruit of the fig tree, squeezing them to find which are still green or more or less ripe; and, when you find a simple and timid one, you force him to come from the Chersonese, then you seize him by the middle, throttle him by the neck, while you twist his shoulder back; he falls and you devour him. Besides, you know very well how to select from among the citizens those who are as meek as lambs, rich, without guile and loathers of lawsuits.

## CLEON

Eh! what! Knights, are you helping them? But, if I am beaten, it is in your cause, for I was going to propose to erect a statue in the city in memory of your bravery.<sup>6</sup>

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! the impostor! the dull varlet! See! he treats us like old dotards and crawls at our feet to deceive us; but the cunning wherein his power lies shall this time recoil on himself; he trips up himself by resorting to such artifices.

## CLEON

Oh citizens! oh people! see how these brutes are bursting my belly.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What shouts! but it's this very bawling that incessantly upsets the city!

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

I can shout too—and so loud that you will flee with fear.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you shout louder than he does I will strike up the triumphal hymn; if you surpass him in impudence the cake is ours.

## CLEON

I denounce this fellow; he has had tasty stews exported from Athens for the Spartan fleet.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I denounce *him*; he runs into the Prytaneum with an empty belly and comes out with it full.

## DEMOSTHENES

And by Zeus! he carries off bread, meat, and fish, which is forbidden. Pericles himself never had this right.

*(A screaming match now ensues, each line more raucous than the last. The rapidity of the dialogue likewise increases.)*

## CLEON

You are travelling the right road to get killed.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

I'll bawl three times as loud as you.

## CLEON

I will deafen you with my yells.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I you with my bellowing.

CLEON

I shall calumniate you, if you become a Strategus.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Dog, I will lay your back open with the lash.

CLEON

I will make you drop your arrogance.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will baffle your machinations.

CLEON

Dare to look me in the face!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I too was brought up in the market-place.

CLEON

I will cut you to shreds if you whisper a word.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

If you open your mouth, I'll shut it with shit.

CLEON

I admit I'm a thief; that's more than you do.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

By our Hermes of the market-place, if caught in the act, why, I perjure myself before those who saw me.

CLEON

These are my own special tricks. I will denounce you to the Prytanes as the owner of sacred tripe, that has not paid tithe.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! you scoundrel! you impudent bawler! everything is filled with your daring, all Attica, the Assembly, the Treasury, the decrees, the tribunals. As a furious torrent you have overthrown our city; your outcries have deafened Athens and, posted upon a high rock, you have lain in wait for the tribute moneys as the fisherman does for the tunny-fish.

CLEON (*somewhat less loudly*)

I know your tricks; it's an old plot resoled.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

If you know naught of soling, I understand nothing of sausages; you,

who cut bad leather on the slant to make it look stout and deceive the country yokels. They had not worn it a day before it had stretched some two spans.

DEMOSTHENES

That's the very trick he played on me; both my neighbours and my friends laughed heartily at me, and before I reached Pergasæ I was swimming in my shoes.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Have you not always shown that blatant impudence, which is the sole strength of our orators? You push it so far, that you, the head of the State, dare to milk the purses of the opulent aliens and, at sight of you, the son of Hippodamus melts into tears. But here is another man who gives me pleasure, for he is a much greater rascal than you; he will overthrow you; 'tis easy to see, that he will beat you in roguery, in brazenness and in clever turns. Come, you, who have been brought up among the class which to-day gives us all our great men, show us that a liberal education is mere tomfoolery.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Just hear what sort of fellow that fine citizen is.

CLEON

Will you not let me speak?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Assuredly not, for I too am an awful rascal.

DEMOSTHENES

If he does not give in at that, tell him your parents were awful rascals too.

CLEON

Once more, will you let me speak?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, by Zeus!

CLEON

Yes, by Zeus, you shall!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, by Posidon! We will fight first to see who shall speak first.

CLEON

I will die sooner.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will not let you . . .

## DEMOSTHENES

Let him, in the name of the gods, let him die.

## CLEON

What makes you so bold as to dare to speak to my face?

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Because I know both how to speak and how to cook.

## CLEON

Hah! the fine speaker! Truly, if some business matter fell your way, you would know thoroughly well how to attack it, to carve it up alive! Shall I tell you what has happened to you? Like so many others, you have gained some petty lawsuit against some alien. Did you drink enough water to inspire you? Did you mutter over the thing sufficiently through the night, spout it along the street, recite it to all you met? Have you bored your friends enough with it? And for this you deem yourself an orator. You poor fool!

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And what do you drink yourself then, to be able all alone by yourself to dumbfound and stupefy the city so with your clamour?

## CLEON

Can you match me with a rival? Me? When I have devoured a good hot tunny-fish and drunk on top of it a great jar of unmixed wine. I say "to Hell with the generals of Pylos!"

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I, when I have bolted the tripe of an ox together with a sow's belly and swallowed the broth as well, I am fit, though slobbering with grease, to bellow louder than all orators and to terrify Nicias.

## DEMOSTHENES

I admire your language so much; the only thing I do not approve is that you swallow all the broth yourself.

## CLEON

Even though you gorged yourself on sea-dogs, you would not beat the Milesians.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Give me a bullock's breast to devour, and I am a man to traffic in mines

CLEON

I will rush into the Senate and set them all by the ears.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I will pull out your arse to stuff like a sausage.

CLEON

As for me, I will seize you by the rump and hurl you head foremost through the door.

DEMOSTHENES

By Posidon, only after you have thrown *me* there first.

CLEON

(*Beginning another crescendo of competitive screeching*)

Beware of the carcan!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I denounce you for cowardice.

CLEON

I will tan your hide.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will flay you and make a thief's pouch with the skin.

CLEON

I will peg you out on the ground.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will slice you into mince-meat.

CLEON

I will tear out your eyelashes.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will slit your gullet.

DEMOSTHENES

We will set his mouth open with a wooden stick as the cooks do with pigs; we will tear out his tongue, and, looking down his gaping throat, will see whether his inside has any pimples.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Thus then at Athens we have something more fiery than fire, more impudent than impudence itself! 'Tis a grave matter; come, we will push and jostle him without mercy. There, you grip him tightly un-

der the arms; if he gives way at the onset, you will find him nothing but a craven; I know my man.

DEMOSTHENES

That he has been all his life and he has only made himself a name by reaping another's harvest; and now he has tied up the ears he gathered over there, he lets them dry and seeks to sell them.

CLEON

I do not fear you as long as there is a Senate and a people which stands like a fool, gaping in the air.

CHORUS (*singing*)

What unparalleled impudence! 'Tis ever the same brazen front. If I don't hate you, why, I'm ready to take the place of the one blanket Cratinus wets; I'll offer to play a tragedy by Morsimus. Oh! you cheat! who turn all into money, who flutter from one extortion to another; may you disgorge as quickly as you have crammed yourself! Then only would I sing, "Let us drink, let us drink to this happy event!" Then even the son of Ulius, the old wheat-fairy, would empty his cup with transports of joy, crying, "Io, Paean! Io, Bacchus!"

CLEON

By Posidon! You! would you beat me in impudence! If you succeed, may I no longer have my share of the victims offered to Zeus on the city altar.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I, I swear by the blows that have so oft rained upon my shoulders since infancy, and by the knives that have cut me, that I will show more effrontery than you; as sure as I have rounded this fine stomach by feeding on the pieces of bread that had cleansed other folk's greasy fingers.

CLEON

On pieces of bread, like a dog! Ah! wretch! you have the nature of a dog and you dare to fight a dog-headed ape?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I have many another trick in my sack, memories of my childhood's days. I used to linger around the cooks and say to them, "Look, friends, don't you see a swallow? It's the herald of springtime." And while they stood, their noses in the air, I made off with a piece of meat.



## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! most clever man! How well thought out! You did as the eaters of artichokes, you gathered them before the return of the swallows.<sup>6</sup>

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

They could make nothing of it, or, if they suspected a trick, I hid the meat in my crotch and denied the thing by all the gods; so that an orator, seeing me at the game, cried, "This child will get on; he has the mettle that makes a statesman."

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

He argued rightly; to steal, perjure yourself and make your arse receptive are three essentials for climbing high.

## CLEON

I will stop your insolence, or rather the insolence of both of you. I will throw myself upon you like a terrible hurricane ravaging both land and sea at the will of its fury.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Then I will gather up my sausages and entrust myself to the kindly waves of fortune so as to make you all the more enraged.

## DEMOSTHENES

And I will watch in the bilges in case the boat should make water.

## CLEON

No, by Demeter! I swear, it will not be with impunity that you have thieved so many talents from the Athenians.

DEMOSTHENES (*to the SAUSAGE-SELLER*)

Oh! oh! reef your sail a bit! Here is a Northeaster blowing calumniously.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

I know that you got ten talents out of Potidaea.

## CLEON

Wait! I will give you one; but keep it dark!

DEMOSTHENES (*aside*)

Hah! that will please him mightily; (*to the SAUSAGE-SELLER*) now you can travel under full sail. The wind has lost its violence.

## CLEON

I will bring four suits against you, each of one hundred talents.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I twenty against you for shirking duty and more than a thousand for robbery.

CLEON

I maintain that your parents were guilty of sacrilege against the goddess.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I, that one of your grandfathers was a satellite. . . .

CLEON

To whom? Explain!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

To Byrsina, the mother of Hippias.

CLEON

You are an impostor.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And you are a rogue.

*(He strikes CLEON with a sausage.)*

DEMOSTHENES

Hit him hard.

CLEON

Alas! The conspirators are murdering me!

DEMOSTHENES *(to the SAUSAGE-SELLER)*

Hit him! Hit him with all your might! Bruise his belly and lash him with your guts and your tripe! Punish him with both hands!

*(CLEON sinks beneath the blows.)*

CHORUS-LEADER

Oh! vigorous assailant and intrepid heart! See how you have totally routed him in this duel of abuse, so that to us and to the citizens you seem the saviour of the city. How shall I give tongue to my joy and praise you sufficiently?

CLEON *(recovering his wits)*

Ah! by Demeter! I was not ignorant of this plot and these machinations that were being forged and nailed and put together against me.

DEMOSTHENES *(to the SAUSAGE-SELLER)*

Look out, look out! Come, outfence him with some wheelwright slang.<sup>7</sup>

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

His tricks at Argos do not escape me. Under pretence of forming an alliance with the Argives, he is hatching a plot with the Lacedæmonians there; and I know why the bellows are blowing and the metal that is on the anvil; it's the question of the prisoners.

## DEMOSTHENES

Well done! Forge on, if he be a wheelwright.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And there are men at Sparta who are hammering the iron with you; but neither gold nor silver nor prayers nor anything else shall impede my denouncing your trickery to the Athenians.

## CLEON

As for me, I hasten to the Senate to reveal your plotting, your nightly gatherings in the city, your trafficking with the Medes and with the Great King, and all you are foraging for in Boeotia.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

What price then is paid for forage by Boeotians?

## CLEON

Oh! by Heracles! I will tan your hide.

*(He departs.)*

## DEMOSTHENES

Come, if you have both wit and heart, now is the time to show it, as on the day when you hid the meat in your crotch, as you say. Hasten to the Senate, for he will rush there like a tornado to calumniate us all and give vent to his fearful bellowings.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

I am going, but first I must rid myself of my tripe and my knives; I will leave them here.

## DEMOSTHENES

Stay! rub your neck with lard; in this way you will slip between the fingers of calumny.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Spoken like a finished wrestling coach.

## DEMOSTHENES

Now, bolt down these cloves of garlic.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Pray, what for?

## DEMOSTHENES

Well primed with garlic, you will have greater mettle for the fight. But hurry, make haste rapidly!

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

That's just what I'm doing.

*(He departs.)*

## DEMOSTHENES

And, above all, bite your foe, rend him to atoms, tear off his comb and do not return until you have devoured his wattles.

*(He goes into the house of DEMOS.)*

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Go! make your attack with a light heart, avenge me and may Zeus guard you! I burn to see you return the victor and laden with chaplets of glory. And you, spectators, enlightened critics of all kind of poetry, lend an ear to my anapests. *(The Chorus moves forward and faces the audience.)*

Had one of the old authors asked me to mount this stage to recite his verses, he would not have found it hard to persuade me. But our poet of to-day is likewise worthy of this favour; he shares our hatred, he dares to tell the truth, he boldly braves both waterspouts and hurricanes. Many among you, he tells us, have expressed wonder, that he has not long since had a piece presented in his own name, and have asked the reason why. This is what he bids us say in reply to your questions; it is not without grounds that he has courted the shade, for, in his opinion, nothing is more difficult than to cultivate the comic Muse; many court her, but very few secure her favours. Moreover, he knows that you are fickle by nature and betray your poets when they grow old. What fate befell Magnes, when his hair went white? Often enough had he triumphed over his rivals; he had sung in all keys, played the lyre and fluttered wings; he turned into a Lydian and even into a gnat, daubed himself with green to become a frog. All in vain! When young, you applauded him; in his old age you hooted and mocked him, because his genius for raillery had gone. Cratinus again was like a torrent of glory rushing across the plain, up-rooting oak, plane tree and rivals and bearing them pell-mell in his wake. The only songs at the banquet were, "Doro, shod with lying tales" and "Adepts of the Lyric Muse," so great was his renown. Look at him now! he drivels, his lyre has neither strings nor keys, his voice quivers, but you have no pity for him, and you let him wander about as he can, like Connas, his temples circled

with a withered chaplet; the poor old fellow is dying of thirst; he who, in honour of his glorious past, should be in the Prytaneum drinking at his ease, and instead of trudging the country should be sitting amongst the first row of the spectators, close to the statue of Dionysus and loaded with perfumes. Crates, again, have you done hounding him with your rage and your hisses? True, it was but meagre fare that his sterile Muse could offer you; a few ingenious fancies formed the sole ingredients, but nevertheless he knew how to stand firm and to recover from his falls. It is such examples that frighten our poet; in addition, he would tell himself, that before being a pilot, he must first know how to row, then to keep watch at the prow, after that how to gauge the winds, and that only then would he be able to command his vessel. If then you approve this wise caution and his resolve that he would not bore you with foolish nonsense, raise loud waves of applause in his favour this day, so that, at this Lenaeon feast, the breath of your favour may swell the sails of his triumphant galley and the poet may withdraw proud of his success, with head erect and his face beaming with delight.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Posidon, god of the racing steeds, I salute you, you who delight in their neighing and in the resounding clatter of their brass-shod hoofs, god of the swift galleys, which, loaded with mercenaries, cleave the seas with their azure beaks, god of the equestrian contests, in which young rivals, eager for glory, ruin themselves for the sake of distinction with their chariots in the arena, come and direct our chorus; Posidon with the trident of gold, you, who reign over the dolphins, who are worshipped at Sunium and at Geraestus beloved of Phormio and dear to the whole city above all the immortals, I salute you!

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Let us sing the glory of our forefathers, ever victors, both on land and sea, they merit that Athens, rendered famous by these, her worthy sons, should write their deeds upon the sacred peplos. As soon as they saw the enemy, they at once sprang at him without ever counting his strength. Should one of them fall in the conflict he would shake off the dust, deny his mishap and begin the struggle anew. Not one of these generals of old time would have asked Cleaenetus to be fed at the cost of the State; but our present men refuse to fight, unless they get the honours of the Prytaneum and precedence in their seats. As for us, we place our valour gratuitously at the service of Athens and of her gods; our only hope is that, should peace ever put a term to our toils, you will not grudge us our long, scented hair nor our delicate care for our toilet.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! Pallas, guardian of Athens, you, who reign over the most pious city, the most powerful, the richest in warriors and in poets, hasten to my call, bringing in your train our faithful ally in all our expeditions and combats, Victory, who smiles on our choruses and fights with us against our rivals. Oh! goddess! manifest yourself to our sight; this day more than ever we deserve that you should ensure our triumph.

## LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

We will sing likewise the exploits of our steeds! they are worthy of our praises; in what invasions, what fights have I not seen them helping us! But especially admirable were they, when they bravely leapt upon the galleys, taking nothing with them but a coarse wine, some cloves of garlic and onions; despite this, they nevertheless seized the sweeps just like men, curved their backs over the thwarts and shouted, "*Hippapai!* Give way! Come, all pull together! Come, come! How! Samphoras! Are you not rowing?" They rushed down upon the coast of Corinth, and the youngest hollowed out beds in the sand with their hoofs or went to fetch coverings; instead of luzern, they had no food but crabs, which they caught on the strand and even in the sea; so that Theorus causes a Corinthian crab to say, "'Tis a cruel fate, oh P'osidon neither my deep hiding-places, whether on land or at sea, can help me to escape the Knights."

(*The SAUSAGE-SELLER returns.*)

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Welcome, oh, dearest and bravest of men! How distracted I have been during your absence! But here you are back, safe and sound. Tell us about the fight you have had

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

The important thing is that I have beaten the Senate.

CHORUS (*singing*)

All glory to you! Let us burst into shouts of joy! You speak well, but your deeds are even better. Come, tell me everything in detail, what a long journey would I not be ready to take to hear your tale! Come, dear friend, speak with full confidence to your admirers.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

The story is worth hearing. Listen! From here I rushed straight to the Senate, right in the track of this man; he was already letting loose the storm, unchaining the lightning, crushing the Knights beneath huge mountains of calumnies heaped together and having all the air of truth, he called you conspirators and his lies caught root like weeds in every

mind; dark were the looks on every side and brows were knitted. When I saw that the Senate listened to him favourably and was being tricked by his imposture I said to myself, "Come, gods of rascals and braggarts, gods of all fools, and toad-eaters, and thou too, oh market-place, wherein I was bred from my earliest days, give me unbridled audacity, an untiring chatter and a shameless voice." No sooner had I ended this prayer than a pederast farted on my right.<sup>8</sup> "Hah! a good omen," said I, and prostrated myself; then I burst open the door by a vigorous push with my arse, and, opening my mouth to the utmost, shouted, "Senators, I wanted you to be the first to hear the good news; since the war broke out, I have never seen anchovies at a lower price!" All faces brightened at once and I was voted a chaplet<sup>9</sup> for my good tidings; and I added, "With a couple of words I will reveal to you how you can have quantities of anchovies for an obol; all you have to do is to seize on all the dishes the merchants have." With mouths gaping with admiration, they applauded me. However, the Paphlagonian winded the matter and, well knowing the sort of language which pleases the Senate best, said, "Friends, I am resolved to offer one hundred oxen to the goddess in recognition of this happy event." The Senate at once veered to his side. So when I saw myself defeated by this ox dung, I outbade the fellow, crying, "Two hundred!" And beyond this I moved that a vow be made to Diana of a thousand goats if the next day anchovies should only be worth an obol a hundred. And the Senate looked towards me again. The other, stunned with the blow, grew delirious in his speech, and at last the Prytanes and the Scythians dragged him out. The Senators then stood talking noisily about the anchovies. Cleon, however, begged them to listen to the Lacedaemonian envoy, who had come to make proposals of peace; but all with one accord cried "Certainly it's not the moment to think of peace now! If anchovies are so cheap, what need have we of peace? Let the war take its course!" And with loud shouts they demanded that the Prytanes should close the sitting and then they leapt over the rails in all directions. As for me, I slipped away to buy all the coriander seed and leeks there were on the market and gave it to them gratis as seasoning for their anchovies. It was marvellous! They loaded me with praises and caresses; thus I conquered the Senate with an obol's worth of leeks, and here I am.

**CHORUS** (*singing*)

Bravo! you are the spoilt child of Fortune. Ah! our knave has found his match in another, who has far better tricks in his sack, a thousand kinds of knaveries and of wily words. But the fight begins afresh; take care not to weaken; you know that I have long been your most faithful ally.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Ah! ah! here comes the Paphlagonian! One would say it was a hurricane lashing the sea and rolling the waves before it in its fury. He looks as if he wanted to swallow me up alive! Ye gods! what an impudent knave!

CLEON (*as he rushes in*)

To my aid, my beloved lies! I am going to destroy you, or my name is lost.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Oh! how he diverts me with his threats! His bluster makes me laugh! And I dance the *mothon* for joy, and sing at the top of my voice, cuckoo!

CLEON

Ah! by Demeter! if I do not kill and devour you, may I die!

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

If you do not devour me? and I, if I do not drink your blood to the last drop, and then burst with indigestion.

CLEON

I, I will strangle you, I swear it by the front seat which Pylos gained me.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

By the front seat! Ah! might I see you fall into the hindmost scat!

CLEON

By heaven! I will put you to the torture.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

What a lively wit! Come, what's the best to give you to eat? What do you prefer? A purse?

CLEON

I will tear out your insides with my nails.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I will cut off your victuals at the Prytaneum.

CLEON

I will haul you before Demos, who will mete out justice to you.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I too will drag you before him and belch forth more calumnies than you.



CLEON

Why, poor fool, he does not believe you, whereas I play with him at will.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Is then Demos your property, your contemptible creature?

CLEON

It's because I know the dishes that please him.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And these are little mouthfuls, which you serve to him like a clever nurse. You chew the pieces and place some in small quantities in his mouth, while you swallow three parts yourself.

CLEON

Thanks to my skill, I know exactly how to enlarge or contract this gullet.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

My arse is just as clever.

CLEON

Well, my friend, you tricked me at the Senate, but take care! Let us go before Demos.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

That's easily done; come, let's do it right away.

CLEON (*loudly*)

Oh, Demos! Come, I adjure you to help me, my father!

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*more loudly*)

Come, oh, my dear little Demos, come and see how I am insulted.

DEMOS (*coming out of his house followed by DEMOSTHENES*)

What a hubhub! To the Devil with you, bawlers! Alas! my olive branch, which they have torn down! <sup>10</sup> Ah! it's you, Paphlagonian. And who, pray, has been maltreating you?

CLEON

You are the cause of this man and these young people having covered me with blows.

DEMOS

And why?

CLEON

Because you love me passionately, Demos.

DEMOS (*to the SAUSAGE-SELLER*)

And you, who are you?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

His rival. For many a long year have I loved you, have I wished to do you honour, I and a crowd of other men of means. But this rascal here has prevented us. You resemble those young men who do not know where to choose their lovers; you repulse honest folks; to earn your favours, one has to be a lamp-seller, a cobbler, a tanner or a currier.

CLEON

I am the benefactor of the people.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

In what way, please?

CLEON

In what way? I supplanted the Generals at Pylos, I hurried thither and I brought back the Laconian captives.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I, whilst simply loitering, cleared off with a pot from a shop, which another fellow had been boiling.

CLEON

Demos, convene the assembly at once to decide which of us two loves you best and most merits your favour.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Yes, yes, provided it be not at the Pnyx.

DEMOS

I could not sit elsewhere; it is at the Pnyx that you must appear before me.

(*He sits down on a stone in the Orchestra.*)

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Ah! great gods! I am undone! At home this old fellow is the most sensible of men, but the instant he is seated on those cursed stone seats, he is there with mouth agape as if he were hanging up figs by their stems to dry.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Come, loose all sail. Be bold, skilful in attack and entangle him in arguments which admit of no reply. It is difficult to beat him, for he

is full of craft and pulls himself out of the worst corners. Collect all your forces to come forth from this fight covered with glory.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But take care! Let him not assume the attack, get ready your grapples and advance with your vessel to board him!

CLEON

Oh! guardian goddess of our city! oh! Athené if it be true that next to Lysicles, Cynna and Salabaccho none have done so much good for the Athenian people as I, suffer me to continue to be fed at the Prytaneum without working; but if I hate you, if I am not ready to fight in your defence alone and against all, may I perish, be sawn to bits alive and my skin cut up into thongs.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I, Demos, if it be not true, that I love and cherish you, may I be cooked in a stew; and if that is not saying enough, may I be grated on this table with some cheese and then hashed, may a hook be passed through my balls and let me be dragged thus to the Ceramicus!

CLEON

Is it possible, Demos, to love you more than I do? And firstly, as long as you have governed with my consent, have I not filled your treasury, putting pressure on some, torturing others or begging of them, indifferent to the opinion of private individuals, and solely anxious to please you?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

There is nothing so wonderful in all that, Demos; I will do as much; I will thieve the bread of others to serve up to you. No, he has neither love for you nor kindly feeling; his only care is to warm himself with your wood, and I will prove it. You, who, sword in hand, saved Attica from the Median yoke at Marathon; you, whose glorious triumphs we love to extol unceasingly, look, he cares little whether he sees you seated uncomfortably upon a stone; whereas I, I bring you this cushion, which I have sewn with my own hands. Rise and try this nice soft seat. Did you not put enough strain on your bottom at Salamis?

*(He gives DEMOS the cushion; DEMOS sits on it.)*

DEMOS

Who are you then? Can you be of the race of Harmodius? Upon my faith, that is nobly done and like a true friend of Demos.

CLEON

Petty flattery to prove him your goodwill!

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

But you have caught him with even smaller baits!

## CLEON

Never had Demos a defender or a friend more devoted than myself; on my head, on my life, I swear it!

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

You pretend to love him and for eight years you have seen him housed in casks, in crevices and dovecots,<sup>11</sup> where he is blinded with the smoke, and you lock him in without pity; Archeptolemus brought peace and you tore it to ribbons; the envoys who come to propose a truce you drive from the city with kicks in their arses.

## CLEON

The purpose of this is that Demos may rule over all the Greeks; for the oracles predict that, if he is patient, he must one day sit as judge in Arcadia at five obols per day. Meanwhile, I will nourish him, look after him and, above all, I will ensure to him his three obols.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, little you care for his reigning in Arcadia, it's to pillage and impose on the allies at will that you reckon; you wish the war to conceal your rogueries as in a mist, that Demos may see nothing of them, and harassed by cares, may only depend on yourself for his bread. But if ever peace is restored to him, if ever he returns to his lands to comfort himself once more with good cakes, to greet his cherished olives, he will know the blessings you have kept him out of, even though paying him a salary; and, filled with hatred and rage, he will rise, burning with desire to vote against you. You know this only too well; it is for this you rock him to sleep with your lies.

## CLEON

Is it not shameful, that you should dare thus to calumniate me before Demos, me, to whom Athens, I swear it by Demeter, already owes more than it ever did to Themistocles?

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*declaiming*)

Oh! citizens of Argos, do you hear what he says? (*to* CLEON) You dare to compare yourself to Themistocles, who found our city half empty and left it full to overflowing, who one day gave us the Piraeus for dinner, and added fresh fish to all our usual meals. You, on the contrary, you, who compare yourself with Themistocles, have only sought to reduce our city in size, to shut it within its walls, to chant oracles to us. And Themistocles goes into exile, while you gorge yourself on the most excellent fare.

## CLEON

Oh! Demos! Am I compelled to hear myself thus abused, and merely because I love you?

## DEMOS

Silence! stop your abuse! All too long have I been your dupe.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Ah! my dear little Demos, he is a rogue who has played you many a scurvy trick; when your back is turned, he taps at the root the lawsuits initiated by the peculators, swallows the proceeds wholesale and helps himself with both hands from the public funds.

## CLEON

Tremble, knave; I will convict you of having stolen thirty thousand drachmae.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

For a rascal of your kidney, you shout rarely! Well! I am ready to die if I do not prove that you have accepted more than forty minae from the Mitylenaeans.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

This indeed may be termed talking. Oh, benefactor of the human race, proceed and you will be the most illustrious of the Greeks. You alone shall have sway in Athens, the allies will obey you, and, trident in hand, you will go about shaking and overturning everything to enrich yourself. But, stick to your man, let him not go; with lungs like yours you will soon have him finished.

## CLEON

No, my brave friends, no, you are running too fast; I have done a sufficiently brilliant deed to shut the mouth of all enemies, so long as one of the bucklers of Pylos remains.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Of the bucklers! Hold! I stop you there and I hold you fast. For if it be true that you love the people, you would not allow these to be hung up with their rings;<sup>12</sup> but it's with an intent you have done this. Demos, take knowledge of his guilty purpose; in this way you no longer can punish him at your pleasure. Note the swarm of young tanners, who really surround him, and close to them the sellers of honey and cheese; all these are at one with him. Very well! you have but to frown, to speak of ostracism and they will rush at night to these bucklers, take them down and seize our granaries.

## DEMOS

Great gods! what! the bucklers retain their rings! Scoundrel! ah! too long have you had me for your dupe, cheated and played with me!

## CLEON

But, dear sir, never you believe all he tells you. Oh! never will you find a more devoted friend than me; unaided, I have known how to put down the conspiracies; nothing that is hatching in the city escapes me, and I hasten to proclaim it loudly.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

You are like the fishers for eels; in still waters they catch nothing, but if they thoroughly stir up the slime, their fishing is good; in the same way it's only in troublous times that you line your pockets. But come, tell me, you, who sell so many skins, have you ever made him a present of a pair of soles for his slippers? and you pretend to love him!

## DEMOS

No, he has never given me any.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

That alone shows up the man; but I, I have bought you this pair of shoes; accept them.

*(He gives DEMOS the shoes; DEMOS puts them on.)*

## DEMOS

None ever, to my knowledge, has merited so much from the people; you are the most zealous of all men for your country and for my toes.

## CLEON

Can a wretched pair of slippers make you forget all that you owe me? Is it not I who curbed the pederasts by erasing Gryttus' name from the lists of citizens?

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Ah! noble Inspector of Arses, let me congratulate you. Moreover, if you set yourself against this form of lewdness, this pederasty, it was for sheer jealousy, knowing it to be the school for orators. But you see this poor Demos without a cloak and that at his age too! so little do you care for him, that in mid-winter you have not given him a garment with sleeves. Here, Demos, here is one, take it!

*(He gives DEMOS a cloak; DEMOS puts it on.)*

## DEMOS

This even Themistocles never thought of; the Piraeus was no doubt a happy idea, but I think this tunic is quite as fine an invention.

CLEON

Must you have recourse to such jackanapes' tricks to supplant me?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, it's your own tricks that I am borrowing, just as a drunken guest, when he has to take a crap, seizes some other man's shoes.

CLEON

Oh! you shall not outdo me in flattery! I am going to hand Demos this garment; all that remains to you, you rogue, is to go and hang yourself.

DEMOS (*as CLEON throws a cloak around his shoulders*)

Faugh! may the plague seize you! You stink of leather horribly.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Why, it's to smother you that he has thrown this cloak around you on top of the other; and it is not the first plot he has planned against you. Do you remember the time when silphium was so cheap?

DEMOS

Aye, to be sure I do!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Very well! it was Cleon who had caused the price to fall so low, that all might eat it, and the jurymen in the Courts were almost asphyxiated from farting in each others' faces.

DEMOS

Hah! why, indeed, a Dungtownite told me the same thing.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Were you not yourself in those days quite red in the gills with farting?

DEMOS

Why, it was a trick worthy of Pyrrhandrus!

CLEON

With what other idle trash will you seek to ruin me, you wretch!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Oh! I shall be more brazen than you, for it's the goddess who has commanded me.

CLEON

No, on my honour, you will not! Here, Demos, feast on this dish; it is your salary as a dicast, which you gain through me for doing naught.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Wait! here is a little box of ointment to rub into the sores on your legs.

## CLEON

I will pluck out your white hairs and make you young again.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Take this hare's tail to wipe the rheum from your eyes.

## CLEON

When you wipe your nose, clean your fingers on my head.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, on mine.

## CLEON

On *mine*. (*To the SAUSAGE-SELLER*) I will have you made a trierarch and you will get ruined through it; I will arrange that you are given an old vessel with rotten sails, which you will have to repair constantly and at great cost.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Our man is on the boil; enough, enough, he is boiling over; remove some of the embers from under him and skim off his threats.

## CLEON

I will punish your self-importance, I will crush you with imposts; I will have you inscribed on the list of the rich.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

For me no threats—only one simple wish. That you may be having some cuttle-fish fried on the stove just as you are going to set forth to plead the cause of the Milesians, which, if you gain it, means a talent in your pocket; that you hurry over devouring the fish to rush off to the Assembly; suddenly you are called and run off with your mouth full so as not to lose the talent and choke yourself. There! that is my wish.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Splendid! by Zeus, Apollo and Demeter!

## DEMOS

Faith! here is an excellent citizen indeed, such as has not been seen for a long time. He's truly a man of the lowest scum! As for you, Paphlagonian, who pretend to love me, you only feed me on garlic. Return me my ring, for you cease to be my steward.



CLEON

Here it is, but be assured, that if you bereave me of my power, my successor will be worse than I am.

DEMOS

This cannot be my ring, I see another device, unless I am going purblind.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What was your device?

DEMOS

A fig-leaf, stuffed with bullock's fat.<sup>13</sup>

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, that is not it.

DEMOS

What is it then?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

It's a gull with beak wide open, haranguing the people from the top of a stone.

DEMOS

Ah! great gods!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What is the matter?

DEMOS

Away! away out of my sight! It's not my ring he had, it was that of Cleonymus. (*To the SAUSAGE-SELLER*) Wait, I'll give you this one; you shall be my steward.

CLEON

Master, I adjure you, decide nothing till you have heard my oracles.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And mine.

CLEON

If you believe him, you will have to prostitute yourself for him.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

If you listen to him, you'll have to let him peel you to the very stump.

## CLEON

My oracles say that you are to reign over the whole earth, crowned with chaplets.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And mine say that, clothed in an embroidered purple robe, you shall pursue Smicythé and her spouse, standing in a chariot of gold and with a crown on your head

## DEMOS

Go, fetch me your oracles, that the Paphlagonian may hear them.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Willingly.

## DEMOS

And you yours.

## CLEON

I'll run.

*(He rushes into the house of DEMOS.)*

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I'll run too; nothing could suit me better!

*(He departs in haste.)*

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! happy day for us and for our children if Cleon perish. Yet just now I heard some old cross-grained pleaders on the marketplace who hold not this opinion discoursing together. Said they, "If Cleon had not had the power, we should have lacked two most useful tools, the pestle and the soup-ladle."<sup>14</sup> You also know what a pig's education he has had; his school-fellows can recall that he only liked the Dorian style and would study no other; his music-master in displeasure sent him away, saying; "This youth, in matters of harmony, will only learn the Dorian style because it is akin to bribery."<sup>15</sup>

CLEON (*coming out of the house with a large package*)

There, look at this heap; and yet I'm not bringing them all.

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*entering with an even larger package*)

Ugh! The weight of them is squeezing the crap right out of me, and still I'm not bringing them all!

DEMOS

What are these?

CLEON

Oracles.

DEMOS

All these?

CLEON

Does that astonish you? Why, I have another whole boxful of them.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I the whole of my attic and two rooms besides.

DEMOS

Come, let us see, whose are these oracles?

CLEON

Mine are those of Bacis.

DEMOS (*to the SAUSAGE-SELLER*)

And whose are yours?

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*without hesitating*)

Glanis's, the elder brother of Bacis.

DEMOS

And of what do they speak?

CLEON

Of Athens and Pylos and you and me and everything.

DEMOS

And yours?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Of Athens and lentils and Lacedæmonians and fresh mackerel and scoundrelly flour-sellers and you and me. Ah! ha! now watch him gnaw his own tool with chagrin!

DEMOS

Come, read them out to me and especially that one I like so much, which says that I shall become an eagle and soar among the clouds.

CLEON

Then listen and be attentive! "Son of Erechtheus, understand the meaning of the words, which the sacred tripods set resounding in the

sanctuary of Apollo. Preserve the sacred dog with the jagged teeth, that barks and howls in your defence; he will ensure you a salary and, if he fails, will perish as the victim of the swarms of jays that hunt him down with their screams."

DEMOS

By Demeter! I do not understand a word of it. What connection is there between Erechtheus, the jays and the dog?

CLEON

I am the dog, since I bark in your defence. Well! Phoebus commands you to keep and cherish your dog.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

That is not what the god says; this dog seems to me to gnaw at the oracles as others gnaw at doorposts. Here is exactly what Apollo says of the dog.

DEMOS

Let us hear, but I must first pick up a stone; an oracle which speaks of a dog might bite my tool.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

"Son of Erechtheus, beware of this Cerberus that enslaves free men; he fawns upon you with his tail when you are dining, but he is lying in wait to devour your dishes should you turn your head an instant; at night he sneaks into the kitchen and, true dog that he is, licks up with one lap of his tongue both your dishes and . . . the islands."

DEMOS

By god, Glanis, you speak better than your brother.

CLEON

Condescend again to hear *me* and then judge: "A woman in sacred Athens will be delivered of a lion, who shall fight for the people against clouds of gnats with the same ferocity as if he were defending his whelps; care ye for him, erect wooden walls around him and towers of brass." Do you understand that?

DEMOS

Not the least bit in the world.

CLEON

The god tells you here to look after me, for I am your lion.

DEMOS

How! You have become a lion and I never knew a thing about it?

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

There is only one thing which he purposely keeps from you; he does not say what this wall of wood and brass is in which Apollo warns you to keep and guard him.

## DEMOS

What does the god mean, then?

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

He advises you to fit him into a five-holed wooden collar.

## DEMOS

Hah! I think that oracle is about to be fulfilled.

## CLEON

Do not believe it; these are but jealous crows, that caw against me; but never cease to cherish your good hawk; never forget that he brought you those Lacedaemonian fish, loaded with chains.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Ah! if the Paphlagonian ran any risk that day, it was because he was drunk. Oh, too credulous son of Cecrops, do you accept that as a glorious exploit? A woman would carry a heavy burden if only a man had put it on her shoulders. But to fight! Go to! he would empty his bowels before he would ever fight.

## CLEON

Note this Pylos in front of Pylos, of which the oracle speaks, "Pylos is before Pylos."

## DEMOS

How "in front of Pylos"? What does he mean by that?

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

He says he will seize upon your bath-tubs.<sup>16</sup>

## DEMOS

Then I shall not bathe to-day.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, as he has stolen our baths. But here is an oracle about the fleet, to which I beg your best attention.

## DEMOS

Read on! I am listening; let us first see how we are to pay our sailors.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

"Son of Ægeus, beware of the tricks of the dog-fox, he bites from the rear and rushes off at full speed; he is nothing but cunning and perfidy." Do you know what the oracle intends to say?

## DEMOS

The dog-fox is Philostratus.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, no, it's Cleon; he is incessantly asking you for light vessels to go and collect the tributes, and Apollo advises you not to grant them.

## DEMOS

What connection is there between a galley and dog-fox?

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

What connection? Why, it's quite plain—a galley travels as fast as a dog.

## DEMOS

Why, then, does the oracle not say dog instead of dog-fox?

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Because he compares the soldiers to young foxes, who, like them, eat the grapes in the fields.

## DEMOS

Good! Well then! how am I to pay the wages of my young foxes?

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will undertake that, and in three days too! But listen to this further oracle, by which Apollo puts you on your guard against the snares of the greedy fist.

## DEMOS

Of what greedy fist?

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

The god in this oracle very clearly points to the hand of Cleon, who incessantly holds his out, saying, "Fill it."

## CLEON

That's a lie! Phoebus means the hand of Diopithes. But here I have a winged oracle, which promises you shall become an eagle and rule over all the earth.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

I have one, which says that you shall be King of the Earth and of the Red Sea too, and that you shall administer justice in Ecbatana, eating fine rich stews the while.

## CLEON

I have seen Athené in a dream, pouring out full vials of riches and health over the people.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

I too have seen the goddess, descending from the Acropolis with an owl perched upon her helmet; on your head she was pouring out ambrosia, on that of Cleon garlic pickle.

## DEMOS

Truly Glanis is the wisest of men. I shall yield myself to you; guide me in my old age and educate me anew.

## CLEON

Ah! I adjure you! not yet; wait a little; I will promise to distribute barley every day.

## DEMOS

Ah! I will not hear another word about barley; you have cheated me too often already, both you and Theophanes.

## CLEON

Well then! you shall have flour-cakes all piping hot.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will give you cakes too, and nice cooked fish; all you'll have to do is eat.

## DEMOS

Very well, mind you keep your promises. To whichever of you shall treat me best I hand over the reins of state.

## CLEON

I will be first.

*(He rushes into the house.)*

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, no, I will.

*(He runs off.)*

CHORUS (*singing*)

Demos, you are our all-powerful sovereign lord; all tremble before you, yet you are led by the nose. You love to be flattered and fooled; you listen to the orators with gaping mouth and your mind is led astray.

DEMOS (*singing*)

It's rather you who have no brains, if you think me so foolish as all that; it is with a purpose that I play this idiot's rôle, for I love to drink the livelong day, and so it pleases me to keep a thief for my minister. When he has thoroughly gorged himself, then I overthrow and crush him.

CHORUS (*singing*)

What profound wisdom! If it be really so, why! all is for the best. Your ministers, then, are your victims, whom you nourish and feed up expressly in the Pnyx, so that, the day your dinner is ready, you may immolate the fattest and eat him.

DEMOS (*singing*)

Look, see how I play with them, while all the time they think themselves such adepts at cheating me. I have my eye on them when they thieve, but I do not appear to be seeing them; then I thrust a judgment down their throat as it were a feather, and force them to vomit up all they have robbed from me.

*(Cleon comes out of the house with a bench and a large basket; at the same moment the SAUSAGE-SELLER arrives with another basket; the two are placed beside one another.)*

## CLEON

Get out of here!

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Get out yourself!

## CLEON

Demos, all is ready these three hours; I await your orders and I burn with desire to load you with benefits.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I ten, twelve, a thousand hours, a long, long while, an infinitely long, long, long while.

## DEMOS

As for me, it's thirty thousand hours that I have been impatient; very long, infinitely long, long, long that I have cursed you.



SAUSAGE-SELLER

Do you know what you had best do?

DEMOS

I will, if you tell me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Declare the lists open and we will contend abreast to determine who shall treat you the best.

DEMOS

Splendid! Draw back in line!

CLEON

I am ready.

DEMOS

Off you go!

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*to* CLEON)

I shall not let you get to the tape.

DEMOS

What fervent lovers! If I am not to-day the happiest of men, it will be because I am the most disgusted.

CLEON (*putting down the bench for* DEMOS)

Look! I am the first to bring you a seat.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I a table.

(*He places his sausage-tray in front of* DEMOS.)

CLEON

Wait, here is a cake kneaded of Pylos barley.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Here are crusts, which the ivory hand of the goddess has hallowed.

DEMOS

Oh! Mighty Athené! How large are your fingers!

CLEON

This is pea-soup, as exquisite as it is fine; Pallas the victorious goddess at Pylos is the one who crushed the peas herself.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Oh, Demos! the goddess watches over you; she is stretching forth over your head . . . a stew-pan full of broth.

## DEMOS

And should we still be dwelling in this city without this protecting stew-pan?

## CLEON

Here are some fish, given to you by her who is the terror of our foes.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

The daughter of the mightiest of the gods sends you this meat cooked in its own gravy, along with this dish of tripe and some paunch.

## DEMOS

That's to thank me for the peplus I offered to her; good.

## CLEON

The goddess with the terrible plume invites you to eat this long cake; you will row the harder on it.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

Take this also.

## DEMOS

And what shall I do with this tripe?

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

She sends it you to belly out your galleys, for she is always showing her kindly anxiety for our fleet. Now drink this drink composed of three parts of water to two of wine.

## DEMOS

Ah! what delicious wine, and how well it stands the water.<sup>17</sup>

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

The goddess who came from the head of Zeus mixed this liquor with her own hands.

## CLEON

Hold, here is a piece of good rich cake.

## SAUSAGE-SELLER

But I offer you an entire cake.

CLEON

But you cannot offer him stewed hare as I do.

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*aside*)

Ah! great gods! stewed hare! where shall I find it? Oh! brain of mine, devise some trick!

CLEON (*showing him the hare*)

Do you see this, you rogue?

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*pretending to look afar*)

A fig for that! Here are some people coming to seek me. They are envoys, bearing sacks bulging with money.

CLEON

(*Hearing money mentioned CLEON turns his head, and the SAUSAGE-SELLER seizes the opportunity to snatch away the stewed hare.*)

Where, where, I say?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Bah! What's that to you? Will you not even now let the strangers alone? Dear Demos, do you see this stewed hare which I bring you?

CLEON

Ah! rascal! you have shamelessly robbed me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

You have robbed too, you robbed the Laconians at Pylos.

DEMOS

Please tell me, how did you get the idea to filch it from him?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

The idea comes from the goddess; the theft is all my own.

CLEON

And I had taken such trouble to catch this hare and I was the one who had it cooked.

DEMOS (*to CLEON*)

Get you gone! My thanks are only for him who served it.

CLEON

Ah! wretch! you have beaten me in impudence!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Well then, Demos, say now, who has treated you best, you and your stomach? Decide!

DEMOS

How shall I act here so that the spectators shall approve my judgment?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will tell you. Without saying anything, go and rummage through my basket, and then through the Paphlagonian's, and see what is in them; that's the best way to judge.

DEMOS

Let us see then, what is there in yours?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Why, it's empty, dear little father; I have brought everything to you.

DEMOS

This is a basket devoted to the people.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Now hunt through the Paphlagonian's. (*Pause, as Demos does so*) Well?

DEMOS

Oh! what a lot of good things! Why it's quite full! Oh! what a huge great part of this cake he kept for himself! He had only cut off the least little tiny piece for me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

But this is what he has always done. Of everything he took, he only gave you the crumbs, and kept the bulk.

DEMOS (*to* CLEON)

Oh! rascal! was this the way you robbed me? And I was loading you with chaplets and gifts!

CLEON

I robbed for the public weal.

DEMOS (*to* CLEON)

Give me back that crown; I shall give it to him.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Return it quick, quick, you gallows-bird.

CLEON

No, for the Pythian oracle has revealed to me the name of him who shall overthrow me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And that name was mine, nothing can be clearer.

CLEON

Reply and I shall soon see whether you are indeed the man whom the god intended. Firstly, what school did you attend when a child?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

It was in the kitchens, where I was taught with cuffs and blows.

CLEON

What's that you say? (*aside*) Ah! this is truly what the oracle said. (*To the SAUSAGE-SELLER*) And what did you learn from the master of exercises?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I learnt to take a false oath without a smile, when I had stolen something.

CLEON (*frightened; aside*)

Oh! Phoebus Apollo, god of Lycia! I am undone! (*To the SAUSAGE-SELLER*) And when you had become a man, what trade did you follow?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I sold sausages and did a bit of fornication.

CLEON (*in consternation; aside*)

Oh! my god! I am a lost man! Ah! still one slender hope remains. (*to the SAUSAGE-SELLER*) Tell me, was it on the market-place or near the gates that you sold your sausages?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Near the gates, in the market for salted goods.

CLEON (*in tragic despair*)

Alas! I see the prophecy of the god is verily come true. Alas! roll me home I am a miserable ruined man. Farewell, my chaplet. 'Tis death to me to part with you. So you are to belong to another; 'tis certain he cannot be a greater thief, but perhaps he may be a luckier one.

(*He gives the chaplet to the SAUSAGE-SELLER.*)

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Oh! Zeus, protector of Greece! 'tis to you I owe this victory!

DEMOSTHENES

Hail! illustrious conqueror, but forget not, that if you have become a great man, 'tis thanks to me; I ask but a little thing; appoint me secretary of the law-court in the room of Phanus.

DEMOS (*to the SAUSAGE-SELLER*)

But what is your name then? Tell me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

My name is Agoracritus, because I have always lived on the marketplace in the midst of lawsuits.

DEMOS

Well then, Agoracritus, I stand by you; as for the Paphlagonian, I hand him over to your mercy.

AGORACRITUS

Demos, I will care for you to the best of my power, and all shall admit that no citizen is more devoted than I to this city of simpletons.

(*They all enter the house of DEMOS.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

What fitter theme for our Muse, at the close as at the beginning of our work, than this, to sing the hero who drives his swift steeds down the arena? Why afflict Lysistratus with our satires on his poverty, and Thumantis, who has not so much as a lodging? He is dying of hunger and can be seen at Delphi, his face bathed in tears, clinging to your quiver, oh, Apollo! and supplicating you to take him out of his misery.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

An insult directed at the wicked is not to be censured; on the contrary, the honest man, if he has sense, can only applaud. Him, whom I wish to brand with infamy, is little known himself; he's the brother of Arignotus. I regret to quote this name which is so dear to me, but whoever can distinguish black from white, or the Orthian mode of music from others, knows the virtues of Arignotus, whom his brother, Ariphrades, in no way resembles. He gloats in vice, is not merely a dissolute man and utterly debauched—but he has actually invented a new form of vice; for he pollutes his tongue with abominable pleasures in brothels, befouling all of his body.<sup>18</sup> Whoever is not horrified at such a monster shall never drink from the same cup with me.

CHORUS (*singing*)

At times a thought weighs on me at night; I wonder whence comes this fearful voracity of Cleonymus. 'Tis said that when dining with a rich host, he springs at the dishes with the gluttony of a wild beast and never leaves the bread-bin until his host seizes him round the knees, exclaiming, "Go, go, good gentleman, in mercy go, and spare my poor table!"

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It is said that the triremes assembled in council and that the oldest spoke in these terms, "Are you ignorant, my sisters, of what is plotting in Athens? They say that a certain Hyperbolus, a bad citizen and an infamous scoundrel, asks for a hundred of us to take them to sea against Carthage." All were indignant, and one of them, as yet a virgin, cried, "May god forbid that I should ever obey him! I would prefer to grow old in the harbour and be gnawed by worms. No! by the gods I swear it, Nauphanté, daughter of Nauson, shall never bend to his law; that's as true as I am made of wood and pitch. If the Athenians vote for the proposal of Hyperbolus, let them! we will hoist full sail and seek refuge by the temple of Theseus or the shrine of the Eumenides. No! he shall not command us! No! he shall not play with the city to this extent! Let him sail by himself for Tartarus, if such please him, launching the boats in which he used to sell his lamps."

(*The SAUSAGE-SELLER comes out of the house of DEMOS, splendidly robed.*)

AGORACRITUS (*solemnly*)

Maintain a holy silence! Keep your mouths from utterance! call no more witnesses; close these tribunals, which are the delight of this city, and gather at the theatre to chant the Paean of thanksgiving to the gods for a fresh favour.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! torch of sacred Athens, saviour of the Islands, what good tidings are we to celebrate by letting the blood of the victims flow in our market-places?

## AGORACRITUS

I have freshened Demos up somewhat on the stove and have turned his ugliness into beauty.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I admire your inventive genius; but, where is he?

## AGORACRITUS

He is living in ancient Athens, the city of the garlands of violets.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

How I should like to see him! What is his dress like, what his manner?

## AGORACRITUS

He has once more become as he was in the days when he lived with Aristides and Miltiades. But you will judge for yourselves, for I hear the

vestibule doors opening. Hail with your shouts of gladness the Athens of old, which now doth reappear to your gaze, admirable, worthy of the songs of the poets and the home of the illustrious Demos.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! noble, brilliant Athens, whose brow is wreathed with violets, show us the sovereign master of this land and of all Greece.

(DEMOS comes from his house, rejuvenated and joyous.)

## AGORACRITUS

Lo! here he is coming with his hair held in place with a golden band and in all the glory of his old-world dress; perfumed with myrrh, he spreads around him not the odour of lawsuits, but that of peace.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hail! King of Greece, we congratulate you upon the happiness you enjoy; it is worthy of this city, worthy of the glory of Marathon.

## DEMOS

Come, Agoracritus, come, my best friend; see the service you have done me by freshening me up on your stove.

## AGORACRITUS

Ah! if you but remembered what you were formerly and what you did, you would for a certainty believe me to be a god.

## DEMOS

But what did I do? and how was I then?

## AGORACRITUS

Firstly, so soon as ever an orator declared in the Assembly, "Demos, I love you ardently; it is I alone who dream of you and watch over your interests"; at such an exordium you would look like a cock flapping his wings or a bull tossing his horns.

## DEMOS

What, I?

## AGORACRITUS

Then, after he had fooled you to the hilt, he would go.

## DEMOS

What! they would treat me so, and I never saw it?

## AGORACRITUS

You knew only how to open and close your ears like a sunshade.



DEMOS

Was I then so stupid and such a dotard?

AGORACRITUS

Worse than that; if one of two orators proposed to equip a fleet for war and the other suggested the use of the same sum for paying out to the citizens, it was the latter who always carried the day. Well! you droop your head! Why do you turn away your face?

DEMOS

I am blushing at my past errors.

AGORACRITUS

Think no more of them; it's not you who are to blame, but those who cheated you in this sorry fashion. But, come, if some impudent lawyer dared to say, "Dicasts, you shall have no wheat unless you convict this accused man!" what would you do? Tell me.

DEMOS

I would have him removed from the bar, I would bind Hyperbolus about his neck like a stone and would fling him into the Barathrum.

AGORACRITUS

Well spoken! but what other measures do you wish to take?

DEMOS

First, as soon as ever a fleet returns to the harbour, I shall pay up the rowers in full.

AGORACRITUS

That will soothe many a worn and chafed bottom.

DEMOS

Further, the hoplite enrolled for military service shall not get transferred to another service through favour, but shall stick to that given him at the outset.

AGORACRITUS

This will strike the buckler of Cleonymus full in the centre.

DEMOS

None shall ascend the rostrum, unless his chin is bearded.

AGORACRITUS

What then will become of Clisthenes and of Strato?

## DEMOS

I wish only to refer to those youths who loll about the perfume shops, babbling at random, "What a clever fellow is Phaeax! How cleverly he escaped death! how concise and convincing is his style! what phrases! how clear and to the point! how well he knows how to quell an interruption!"

## AGORACRITUS

I thought you were the lover of those fairies.

## DEMOS

The gods forefend it! and I will force all such fellows to go hunting instead of proposing decrees.

## AGORACRITUS

In that case, accept this folding-stool, and, to carry it, this well-grown, big-balled slave lad. Besides, you may put him to any other purpose you please.

## DEMOS

Oh! I am happy indeed to find myself as I was of old!

## AGORACRITUS

Aye, you will deem yourself happy, when I have handed you the truce of thirty years. Truce! step forward!

*(Enter Truce, in the form of a beautiful young girl, magnificently attired.)*

## DEMOS

Great gods! how charming she is! Can I do with her as I wish? where did you discover her, pray?

## AGORACRITUS

That Paphlagonian had kept her locked up in his house, so that you might not enjoy her. As for myself, I give her to you; take her with you into the country.

## DEMOS

And what punishment will you inflict upon this Paphlagonian, the cause of all my troubles?

## AGORACRITUS

It will not be over-terrible. I condemn him to follow my old trade; posted near the gates, he must sell sausages of asses' and dogs' meat; perpetually drunk, he will exchange foul language with prostitutes and will drink nothing but the dirty water from the baths.

## DEMOS

Well conceived! he is indeed fit to wrangle with harlots and bathmen; as for you, in return for so many blessings, I invite you to take the place at the Prytaneum which this rogue once occupied. Put on his frog-green mantle and follow me. As for the other, let them take him away; let him go sell his sausages in full view of the foreigners, whom he used formerly to insult so wantonly.

## NOTES FOR THE KNIGHTS

1. Aristophanes never tires of twitting Euripides with the fact or fancy that his mother had sold vegetables.
2. Eucrates: see the Glossary.
3. Lysicles: see the Glossary.
4. The same actor played the parts of both Nicias and Cleon; hence Nicias does not reappear in the comedy.
5. The cavalry had been responsible for an Athenian victory at Corinth in 425.
6. Artichokes were tenderest in early spring.
7. In order to endear themselves to the masses, the demagogues were wont to vulgarize their oratory with terms derived from various trades.
8. Thunder on the right was a favourable omen.
9. The Athenians had three ways of signifying their gratitude to persons who had served the state outstandingly well. They might grant: 1) The privilege of dining in the Prytaneum; 2) A chaplet or garland, the ancient equivalent of a medal of honour; 3) A front seat in the theatre.
10. In the Pyanepsian procession the children carried olive branches around which were wound strips of linen. After the festival these were hung up over the doors of the houses. Modern superstition exhibits analogous actions on Palm Sunday.
11. In the early years of the Peloponnesian War the Spartans invaded Attica almost every year, and the rural population was forced to move into the city, where they were very inadequately housed.
12. When bucklers were hung up as trophies it was usual to detach the ring or brace, in order to render them useless for military purposes.
13. There is a pun here on the Greek words *dēmos*, "people" and *demós*, "fat."
14. The implication of this remark is that Cleon is so adept at crushing and overturning the fortunes of Athens that he is to be credited with the invention of the utensils with which these operations are culinarily performed.
15. Aristophanes has here coined the word *Dorodokisti*, which is patterned after *Doristi*, "in the Dorian mode," with the added suggestion of

*dorodokos*, "taker of bribes." Following the lead of a French translator, we might speak of the "louis d'or-ian mode."

16. The Greek word for bath-tub was *pyelos*.

17. The ancients regularly diluted their wine with a more or less generous admixture of water.

18. The original here contains, and the translation omits, a number of details on the new form of vice. Only a pedant would demand their inclusion, for like many other parts of this play they are totally deficient in humour. Cunnilingual activities are not particularly new nowadays anyway, and our psychologists will inform the curious more thoroughly and more reliably than Aristophanes.

III  
THE CLOUDS

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

STREPSIADES

PHIDIPPIDES

SERVANT OF STREPSIADES

DISCIPLES OF SOCRATES

SOCRATES

JUST DISCOURSE

UNJUST DISCOURSE

PASIAS, *a Money-lender*

AMYNIAS, *another Money-lender*

CHORUS OF CLOUDS

## INTRODUCTION

THE consecutive successes of *The Acharnians* and *The Knights* in 425 and 424 had filled Aristophanes with pride and bereft him of judgment, and at the Great Dionysia of 423 he expectantly produced what he misguidedly considered his best comedy, *The Clouds*. The award of the third and lowest prize was a disappointment at once bitter and salutary; if the poet never quite forgave the Athenian populace for its eminently just verdict, he at least did not again endeavour to create comedy out of intellectual backwardness and none of his later plays is so lacking in levity or so fettered with message.

The piece opens with a soliloquy by Strepsiades, an old and stupid rustic for whom Aristophanes shows traces of an affection difficult to comprehend and impossible to share. Deeply in debt because of the extravagance of his horse-racing son Phidippides and sleepless with worry over what to do, he finally decides to call in the aid of the new science by which Sophists enable their pupils to confute their creditors and preserve their fortunes. When his request that Phidippides learn this useful art is summarily rejected Strepsiades resolves to study it himself and goes over to the Thoughtery, the house of Socrates, which is next door to his own. Here he finds the disciples of the Sophist engaged in a number of ridiculous travesties on scientific investigation and soon the Master himself appears, suspended in a basket and "contémplating the sun."

Strepsiades begs to be accepted as a pupil and swears to pay whatever sum Socrates may name. The mention of the gods leads Socrates to expound the truth about celestial matters, and the Clouds, the genii of his school, are invoked with prayers and praises. In this way the poet motivates the entrance of the Chorus and prepares for the scene that follows, in which the new learning is repeatedly and sharply lampooned. Finally Socrates accepts Strepsiades as a pupil and both of them enter the Thoughtery, leaving the stage to the Chorus, which now delivers the parabasis.

The anapests take the Athenians to task for their unappreciative reception of the play, and here for the first time we realize that we are reading a later version of *The Clouds* and not necessarily the one which Aris-



tophanes produced in 423. There is, however, no reason to believe that any essential or extensive changes were made; the poet was too stubbornly fond of the play for that, and we may therefore conclude that what we possess is the reading version published by the author after the production, and probably altered only in the parabasis. The ode is a prayer to Zeus, Posidon, and Apollo. The epirrheme recounts the services of the Clouds to Athens. The antode invokes Apollo, Artemis, Athené, and Dionysus. The antepirrheme reports the Moon's good wishes for Athens, but also her annoyance at the inadequacy of the Athenian calendar.

At the conclusion of the parabasis Socrates comes out of his Thoughtery infuriated at the stupidity of Strepsiades but gallantly resolved not to abandon his attempt to teach him. He decides to continue his efforts in the fresh air, and the spectators are given several samples of the old man's ineptitude. This finally exhausts even Socrates' patience and he leaves in disgust. The Chorus counsels Strepsiades to have his son educated in his stead, and Phidippides this time yields with unexpected and inconsistent readiness.

Socrates decides to have him instructed by none other than the Just and the Unjust Discourses themselves, and soon these worthies appear and engage in a lengthy argument in which the former nostalgically portrays the virtues of olden times and the latter expounds the utility of the modern science. The contest ends with the complete defeat of the Just Discourse, and his triumphant opponent takes over the education of Phidippides and leads him into the Thoughtery. The Chorus ominously voices the opinion that Strepsiades will regret this, and then sings a brief ode in which the power of the Clouds is extolled. At the conclusion of this Socrates appears and presents Strepsiades with his made-over son, now very pale and intellectual looking. The old man takes him home exultantly and is able, even without the scientific assistance of his son, to get rid of two creditors in short order. The Chorus sings a reflective ode, suggestive of those which precede the catastrophe in many tragedies, and immediately Strepsiades runs out of his house, hotly pursued by his ungrateful son, who has beaten his father and now proves that he has been morally quite justified in so doing; he is also willing to demonstrate that he would have a right to inflict the same treatment on his mother, but Strepsiades now perceives what the poet evidently regards as the light and realizing that it is the insidious science of Socrates that has brought him these troubles, he and a slave set fire to the little house in which these subversive studies are pursued.

Such is the plot of the comedy which Aristophanes thought worthy of the highest prize. Our judgment on this question is hampered by the fact that we do not possess the plays which were ranked above it, but we may safely assume that unless they were exceptionally poor, *The Clouds* re-

ceived just what it deserved. It is not a good comedy for a number of reasons and a recital of these is hardly necessary here. Its chief defect, however, lies in its central character, the Aristophanic Socrates. To be amusing, a caricature must strongly resemble its original in all important essentials. These will be grossly exaggerated, to be sure, but to be funny they must be true. If Adolf Hitler were married it might be amusing to portray him as a hen-pecked husband, but no one in his senses would expect an audience to be entertained by such a picture now. Yet Socrates rejected the natural science of his day; refused to organize any school of philosophy; never took pay for his teaching, which he gave gratis to anyone who would discuss ethics or metaphysics with him; made no claims to omniscience, but affected rather to know nothing. In all these respects the character which Aristophanes put on the stage in *The Clouds* is an inept caricature, but it is more flagrantly so in the most important point of all, for no man in Athens was more devoted to truth, honesty, justice, and morality than was Socrates. The irritating dialectician of the market-place must have been a familiar figure to almost every member of the poet's audience, yet the fact that they rejected the Aristophanic Socrates testifies little to their love for the real one and a great deal to their love for good caricatures.

## THE CLOUDS

(SCENE:—*In the background are two houses, that of Strepsiades and that of Socrates, the Thoughtery. The latter is small and dingy; the interior of the former is shown and two beds are seen, each occupied.*)

STREPSIADES (*sitting up*)

GREAT gods! will these nights never end? will daylight never come? I heard the cock crow long ago and my slaves are snoring still! Ah! it wasn't like this formerly. Curses on the war! has it not done me ill enough? Now I may not even chastise my own slaves.<sup>1</sup> Again there's this brave lad, who never wakes the whole long night, but, wrapped in his five coverlets, farts away to his heart's content. (*He lies down*) Come! let me nestle in well and snore too, if it be possible . . . oh! misery, it's vain to think of sleep with all these expenses, this stable, these debts, which are devouring me, thanks to this fine cavalier, who only knows how to look after his long locks, to show himself off in his chariot and to dream of horses! And I, I am nearly dead, when I see the moon bringing the third decade in her train and my liability falling due. . . . Slave! light the lamp and bring me my tablets. (*The slave obeys.*) Who are all my creditors? Let me see and reckon up the interest. What is it I owe? . . . Twelve minæ to Pasias. . . . What! twelve minæ to Pasias? . . . Why did I borrow these? Ah! I know! It was to buy that thoroughbred, which cost me so much. How I should have prized the stone that had blinded him!

PHIDIPIDES (*in his sleep*)

That's not fair, Philo! Drive your chariot straight, I say.

STREPSIADES

This is what is destroying me. He raves about horses, even in his sleep.

PHIDIPIDES (*still sleeping*)

How many times round the track is the race for the chariots of war?

## STREPSIADES

It's your own father you are driving . . . to death . . . to ruin. Come! what debt comes next, after that of Pasiās? . . . Three minæ to Amynias for a chariot and its two wheels.

PHIDIPIDES (*still asleep*)

Give the horse a good roll in the dust and lead him home.

## STREPSIADES

Ah! wretched boy! it's my money that you are making roll. My creditors have distrained on my goods, and here are others again, who demand security for their interest.

PHIDIPIDES (*awaking*)

What is the matter with you, father, that you groan and turn about the whole night through?

## STREPSIADES

I have a bum-bailiff in the bedclothes biting me.

## PHIDIPIDES

For pity's sake, let me have a little sleep. (*He turns over.*)

## STREPSIADES

Very well, sleep on! but remember that all these debts will fall back on your shoulders. Oh! curses on the go-between who made me marry your mother! I lived so happily in the country, a commonplace, everyday life, but a good and easy one—had not a trouble, not a care, was rich in bees, in sheep and in olives. Then indeed I had to marry the niece of Megacles, the son of Megacles; I belonged to the country, she was from the town; she was a haughty, extravagant woman, a true Coesyra. On the nuptial day, when I lay beside her, I was reeking of the dregs of the wine-cup, of cheese and of wool; she was redolent with essences, saffron, voluptuous kisses, the love of spending, of good cheer and of wanton delights. I will not say she did nothing; no, she worked hard . . . to ruin me, and pretending all the while merely to be showing her the cloak she had woven for me, I said, "Wife you go too fast about your work, your threads are too closely woven and you use far too much wool."

(*A slave enters with a lamp.*)

## SLAVE

There is no more oil in the lamp.

## STREPSIADES

Why then did you light such a thirsty lamp? Come here, I am going to beat you.

## SLAVE

What for?

## STREPSIADES

Because you have put in too thick a wick. . . . Later, when we had this boy, what was to be his name? It was the cause of much quarrelling with my loving wife. She insisted on having some reference to a horse in his name, that he should be called Xanthippus, Charippus or Callippides.<sup>2</sup> I wanted to name him Phidonides after his grandfather. We disputed long, and finally agreed to style him Phidippides. . . . She used to fondle and coax him, saying, "Oh! what a joy it will be to me when you have grown up, to see you, like my father, Megacles, clothed in purple and standing up straight in your chariot driving your steeds toward the town." And I would say to him, "When, like your father, you will go, dressed in a skin, to fetch back your goats from Phelleus." Alas! he never listened to me and his madness for horses has shattered my fortune. (*He gets out of bed.*) But by dint of thinking the livelong night, I have discovered a road to salvation, both miraculous and divine. If he will but follow it, I shall be out of my trouble! First, however, he must be awakened, but it must be done as gently as possible. How shall I manage it? Phidippides! my little Phidippides!

PHIDIPPIDES (*awaking again*)

What is it, father?

## STREPSIADES

Kiss me and give me your hand.

PHIDIPPIDES (*getting up and doing as his father requests*)

There! What's it all about?

## STREPSIADES

Tell me! do you love me?

## PHIDIPPIDES

By Posidon, the equestrian Posidon! yes, I swear I do.

## STREPSIADES

Oh, do not, I pray you, invoke this god of horses; he is the one who is the cause of all my cares. But if you really love me, and with your whole heart, my boy, believe me.

## PHIDIPPIDES

Believe you? about what?

STREPSIADES

Alter your habits forthwith and go and learn what I tell you.

PHIDIPPIDES

Say on, what are your orders?

STREPSIADES

Will you obey me ever so little?

PHIDIPPIDES

By Bacchus, I will obey you.

STREPSIADES

Very well then! Look this way. Do you see that little door and that little house?

PHIDIPPIDES

Yes, father. But what are you driving at?

STREPSIADES

That is the Thoughtery of wise souls. There they prove that we are coals enclosed on all sides under a vast snuffer, which is the sky. If well paid, these men also teach one how to gain law-suits, whether they be just or not.

PHIDIPPIDES

What do they call themselves?

STREPSIADES

I do not know exactly, but they are deep thinkers and most admirable people.

PHIDIPPIDES

Bah! the wretches! I know them; you mean those quacks with pale faces, those barefoot fellows, such as that miserable Socrates and Chaerephon?

STREPSIADES

Silence! say nothing foolish! If you desire your father not to die of hunger, join their company and let your horses go.

PHIDIPPIDES

No, by Bacchus! even though you gave me the pheasants that Leogoras raises.

STREPSIADES

Oh! my beloved son, I beseech you, go and follow their teachings.

## PHIDIPIDES

And what is it I should learn?

## STREPSIADES

It seems they have two courses of reasoning, the true and the false, and that, thanks to the false, the worst law-suits can be gained. If then you learn this science, which is false, I shall not have to pay an obolus of all the debts I have contracted on your account.

## PHIDIPIDES

No, I will not do it. I should no longer dare to look at our gallant horsemen, when I had so ruined my tan.

## STREPSIADES

Well then, by Demeter! I will no longer support you, neither you, nor your team, nor your saddle-horse. Go and hang yourself, I turn you out of house and home.

## PHIDIPIDES

My uncle Megacles will not leave me without horses; I shall go to him and laugh at your anger.

(*He departs. STREPSIADES goes over to SOCRATES' house.*)

## STREPSIADES

One rebuff shall not dishearten me. With the help of the gods I will enter the Thoughtery and learn myself. (*He hesitates.*) But at my age, memory has gone and the mind is slow to grasp things. How can all these fine distinctions, these subtleties be learned? (*Making up his mind*) Bah! why should I dally thus instead of rapping at the door? Slave, slave!

(*He knocks and calls.*)

A DISCIPLE (*from within*)

A plague on you! Who are you?

## STREPSIADES

Strepsiades, the son of Phido, of the deme of Cicynna.

DISCIPLE (*coming out of the door*)

You are nothing but an ignorant and illiterate fellow to let fly at the door with such kicks. You have brought on a miscarriage—of an idea!

## STREPSIADES

Pardon me, please; for I live far away from here in the country. But tell me, what was the idea that miscarried?

## DISCIPLE

I may not tell it to any but a disciple.

STREPSIADES

Then tell me without fear, for I have come to study among you.

DISCIPLE

Very well then, but reflect, that these are mysteries. Lately, a flea bit Chaerephon on the brow and then from there sprang on to the head of Socrates. Socrates asked Chaerephon, "How many times the length of its legs does a flea jump?"

STREPSIADES

And how ever did he go about measuring it?

DISCIPLE

Oh! it was most ingenious! He melted some wax, seized the flea and dipped its two feet in the wax, which, when cooled, left them shod with true Persian slippers. These he took off and with them measured the distance.

STREPSIADES

Ah! great Zeus! what a brain! what subtlety!

DISCIPLE

I wonder what then would you say, if you knew another of Socrates' contrivances?

STREPSIADES

What is it? Pray tell me.

DISCIPLE

Chaerephon of the deme of Sphettia asked him whether he thought a gnat buzzed through its proboscis or through its anus.

STREPSIADES

And what did he say about the gnat?

DISCIPLE

He said that the gut of the gnat was narrow, and that, in passing through this tiny passage, the air is driven with force towards the breech; then after this slender channel, it encountered the rump, which was distended like a trumpet, and there it resounded sonorously.

STREPSIADES

So the arse of a gnat is a trumpet. Oh! what a splendid arsevation! <sup>3</sup> Thrice happy Socrates! It would not be difficult to succeed in a law-suit, knowing so much about a gnat's guts!



DISCIPLE

Not long ago a lizard caused him the loss of a sublime thought.

STREPSIADES

In what way, please?

DISCIPLE

One night, when he was studying the course of the moon and its revolutions and was gazing open-mouthed at the heavens, a lizard crapped upon him from the top of the roof.

STREPSIADES

A lizard crapping on Socrates! That's rich!

DISCIPLE

Last night we had nothing to eat.

STREPSIADES

Well, what did he contrive, to secure you some supper?

DISCIPLE

He spread over the table a light layer of cinders, bending an iron rod the while; then he took up a pair of compasses and at the same moment unhooked a piece of the victim which was hanging in the palaestra.

STREPSIADES

And we still dare to admire Thales! Open, open this home of knowledge to me quickly! Haste, haste to show me Socrates; I long to become his disciple. But do please open the door. (*The door opens, revealing the interior of the Thoughtery, in which the DISCIPLES OF SOCRATES are seen in various postures of meditation and study; they are pale and emaciated creatures.*) Ah! by Heracles! what country are those animals from?

DISCIPLE

Why, what are you astonished at? What do you think they resemble?

STREPSIADES

The captives of Pylos. But why do they look so fixedly on the ground?

DISCIPLE

They are seeking for what is below the ground.

STREPSIADES

Ah! they're looking for onions. Do not give yourselves so much trouble; I know where there are some, fine big ones. But what are those fellows doing, bent all double?

DISCIPLE

They are sounding the abysses of Tartarus.

STREPSIADES

And what are their arses looking at in the heavens?

DISCIPLE

They are studying astronomy on their own account. But come in so that the master may not find us here.

STREPSIADES

Not yet; not yet; let them not change their position. I want to tell them my own little matter.

DISCIPLE

But they may not stay too long in the open air and away from school.

STREPSIADES (*pointing to a celestial globe*)

In the name of all the gods, what is that? Tell me.

DISCIPLE

That is astronomy.

STREPSIADES (*pointing to a map*)

And that?

DISCIPLE

Geometry.

STREPSIADES

What is that used for?

DISCIPLE

To measure the land.

STREPSIADES

But that is apportioned by lot.

DISCIPLE

No, no, I mean the entire earth.

STREPSIADES

Ah! what a funny thing! How generally useful indeed is this invention!

DISCIPLE

There is the whole surface of the earth. Look! Here is Athens.

STREPSIADES

Athens! you are mistaken; I see no courts in session.

DISCIPLE

Nevertheless it is really and truly the Attic territory.

STREPSIADES

And where are my neighbours of Cicynna?

DISCIPLE

They live here. This is Euboea; you see this island, that is so long and narrow.

STREPSIADES

I know. Because we and Pericles have stretched it by dint of squeezing it. And where is Lacedaemon?

DISCIPLE

Lacedaemon? Why, here it is, look.

STREPSIADES

How near it is to us! Think it well over, it must be removed to a greater distance.

DISCIPLE

But, by Zeus, that is not possible.

STREPSIADES

Then, woe to you! and who is this man suspended up in a basket?

DISCIPLE

That's *himself*.

STREPSIADES

Who's himself?

DISCIPLE

Socrates.

STREPSIADES

Socrates! Oh! I pray you, call him right loudly for me.

DISCIPLE

Call him yourself; I have no time to waste. (*He departs. The machine swings in* SOCRATES *in a basket.*)

STREPSIADES

Socrates! my little Socrates!

SOCRATES (*loftily*)

Mortal, what do you want with me?

STREPSIADES

First, what are you doing up there? Tell me, I beseech you.

SOCRATES (*pompously*)

I am traversing the air and contemplating the sun.

STREPSIADES

Thus it's not on the solid ground, but from the height of this basket, that you slight the gods, if indeed . . .

SOCRATES

I have to suspend my brain and mingle the subtle essence of my mind with this air, which is of the like nature, in order clearly to penetrate the things of heaven. I should have discovered nothing, had I remained on the ground to consider from below the things that are above; for the earth by its force attracts the sap of the mind to itself. It's just the same with the water-cress.

STREPSIADES

What? Does the mind attract the sap of the water-cress? Ah! my dear little Socrates, come down to me! I have come to ask you for lessons.

SOCRATES (*descending*)

And for what lessons?

STREPSIADES

I want to learn how to speak. I have borrowed money, and my merciless creditors do not leave me a moment's peace; all my goods are at stake.

SOCRATES

And how was it you did not see that you were getting so much into debt?

STREPSIADES

My ruin has been the madness for horses, a most rapacious evil; but teach me one of your two methods of reasoning, the one whose object is not to repay anything, and, may the gods bear witness, that I am ready to pay any fee you may name.

SOCRATES

By which gods will you swear? To begin with, the gods are not a coin current with us.

STREPSIADES

But what do you swear by then? By the iron money of **Byzantium**?

SOCRATES

Do you really wish to know the truth of celestial matters?

STREPSIADES

Why, yes, if it's possible.

SOCRATES

. . . and to converse with the clouds, who are our genii?

STREPSIADES

Without a doubt.

SOCRATES

Then be seated on this sacred couch.

STREPSIADES (*sitting down*)

I am seated.

SOCRATES

Now take this chaplet.

STREPSIADES

Why a chaplet? Alas! Socrates, would you sacrifice me, like Athamas?

SOCRATES

No, these are the rites of initiation.

STREPSIADES

And what is it I am to gain?

SOCRATES

You will become a thorough rattle-pate, a hardened old stager, the fine flour of the talkers. . . . But come, keep quiet.

STREPSIADES

By Zeus! That's no lie! Soon I shall be nothing but wheat-flour, if you powder me in that fashion.<sup>4</sup>

SOCRATES

Silence, old man, give heed to the prayers. (*In an hicrophantic tone*) Oh! most mighty king, the boundless air, that keepest the earth suspended in space, thou bright Aether and ye venerable goddesses, the Clouds, who carry in your loins the thunder and the lightning, arise, ye sovereign powers and manifest yourselves in the celestial spheres to the eyes of your sage.

## STREPSIADES

Not yet! Wait a bit, till I fold my mantle double, so as not to get wet. And to think that I did not even bring my travelling cap! What a misfortune!

SOCRATES (*ignoring this*)

Come, oh! Clouds, whom I adore, come and show yourselves to this man, whether you be resting on the sacred summits of Olympus, crowned with hoar-frost, or tarrying in the gardens of Ocean, your father, forming sacred choruses with the Nymphs; whether you be gathering the waves of the Nile in golden vases or dwelling in the Mæotic marsh or on the snowy rocks of Mimas, hearken to my prayer and accept my offering. May these sacrifices be pleasing to you.

(*Amidst rumblings of thunder the CHORUS OF CLOUDS appears.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Eternal Clouds, let us appear; let us arise from the roaring depths of Ocean, our father; let us fly towards the lofty mountains, spread our damp wings over their forest-laden summits, whence we will dominate the distant valleys, the harvest fed by the sacred earth, the murmur of the divine streams and the resounding waves of the sea, which the unwearying orb lights up with its glittering beams. But let us shake off the rainy fogs, which hide our immortal beauty and sweep the earth from afar with our gaze.

## SOCRATES

Oh, venerated goddesses, yes, you are answering my call! (*To STREPSIADES.*) Did you hear their voices mingling with the awful growling of the thunder?

## STREPSIADES

Oh! adorable Clouds, I revere you and I too am going to let off *my* thunder, so greatly has your own affrighted me. (*He farts.*) Faith! whether permitted or not, I must, I *must* crap!

## SOCRATES

No scoffing; do not copy those damned comic poets. Come, silence! a numerous host of goddesses approaches with songs.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Virgins, who pour forth the rains, let us move toward Attica, the rich country of Pallas, the home of the brave; let us visit the dear land of Cecrops, where the secret rites are celebrated, where the mysterious sanctuary flies open to the initiate. . . . What victims are offered there to the deities of heaven! What glorious temples! What

statues! What holy prayers to the rulers of Olympus! At every season nothing but sacred festivals, garlanded victims, is to be seen. Then Spring brings round again the joyous feasts of Dionysus, the harmonious contests of the choruses and the serious melodies of the flute.

STREPSIADES

By Zeus! Tell me, Socrates, I pray you, who are these women, whose language is so solemn; can they be demi-goddesses?

SOCRATES

Not at all. They are the Clouds of heaven, great goddesses for the lazy; to them we owe all, thoughts, speeches, trickery, roguery, boasting, lies, sagacity.

STREPSIADES

Ah! that was why, as I listened to them, my mind spread out its wings; it burns to babble about trifles, to maintain worthless arguments, to voice its petty reasons, to contradict, to tease some opponent. But are they not going to show themselves? I should like to see them, were it possible.

SOCRATES

Well, look this way in the direction of Parnes; I already see those who are slowly descending.

STREPSIADES

But where, where? Show them to me.

SOCRATES

They are advancing in a throng, following an oblique path across the dales and thickets.

STREPSIADES

Strange! I can see nothing.

SOCRATES

There, close to the entrance.

STREPSIADES

Hardly, if at all, can I distinguish them.

SOCRATES

You *must* see them clearly now, unless your eyes are filled with gum as thick as pumpkins.

## STREPSIADES

Aye, undoubtedly! Oh! the venerable goddesses! Why, they fill up the entire stage.

## SOCRATES

And you did not know, you never suspected, that they were goddesses?

## STREPSIADES

No, indeed; I thought the Clouds were only fog, dew and vapour.

## SOCRATES

But what you certainly do not know is that they are the support of a crowd of quacks, the diviners, who were sent to Thurium, the notorious physicians, the well-combed fops, who load their fingers with rings down to the nails, and the braggarts, who write dithyrambic verses, all these are idlers whom the Clouds provide a living for, because they sing them in their verses.

## STREPSIADES

It is then for this that they praise "the rapid flight of the moist clouds, which veil the brightness of day" and "the waving locks of the hundred-headed Typho" and "the impetuous tempests, which float through the heavens, like birds of prey with aerial wings loaded with mists" and "the rains, the dew, which the clouds outpour." As a reward for these fine phrases they bolt well-grown, tasty mullet and delicate thrushes.

## SOCRATES

Yes, thanks to these. And is it not right and meet?

## STREPSIADES

Tell me then why, if these really are the Clouds, they so very much resemble mortals. This is not their usual form.

## SOCRATES

What are they like then?

## STREPSIADES

I don't know exactly; well, they are like great packs of wool, but not like women—no, not in the least. . . . And these have noses.

## SOCRATES

Answer my questions.

## STREPSIADES

Willingly! Go on, I am listening.



SOCRATES

Have you not sometimes seen clouds in the sky like a centaur, a leopard, a wolf or a bull?

STREPSIADES

Why, certainly I have, but what of that?

SOCRATES

They take what metamorphosis they like. If they see a debauchee with long flowing locks and hairy as a beast, like the son of Xenophantes, they take the form of a Centaur in derision of his shameful passion.

STREPSIADES

And when they see Simon, that thief of public money, what do they do then?

SOCRATES

To picture him to the life, they turn at once into wolves.

STREPSIADES

So that was why yesterday, when they saw Cleonymus, who cast away his buckler because he is the veriest poltroon amongst men, they changed into deer.

SOCRATES

And to-day they have seen Clisthenes; you see . . . they are women.

STREPSIADES

Hail, sovereign goddesses, and if ever you have let your celestial voice be heard by mortal ears, speak to me, oh! speak to me, ye all-powerful queens.

CHORUS-LEADER

Hail! veteran of the ancient times, you who burn to instruct yourself in fine language. And you, great high-priest of subtle nonsense, tell us your desire. To you and Prodicus alone of all the hollow orationers of to-day have we lent an ear—to Prodicus, because of his knowledge and his great wisdom, and to you, because you walk with head erect, a confident look, barefooted, resigned to everything and proud of our protection.

STREPSIADES

Oh! Earth! What august utterances! how sacred! how wondrous!

SOCRATES

That is because these are the only goddesses; all the rest are pure myth.

STREPSIADES

But by the Earth! is our father, Zeus, the Olympian, not a god?

SOCRATES

Zeus! what Zeus! Are you mad? There is no Zeus.

STREPSIADES

What are you saying now? Who causes the rain to fall? Answer me that!

SOCRATES

Why, these, and I will prove it. Have you ever seen it raining without clouds? Let Zeus then cause rain with a clear sky and without their presence!

STREPSIADES

By Apollo! that is powerfully argued! For my own part, I always thought it was Zeus pissing into a sieve. But tell me, who is it makes the thunder, which I so much dread?

SOCRATES

These, when they roll one over the other.

STREPSIADES

But how can that be? you most daring among men!

SOCRATES

Being full of water, and forced to move along, they are of necessity precipitated in rain, being fully distended with moisture from the regions where they have been floating; hence they bump each other heavily and burst with great noise.

STREPSIADES

But is it not Zeus who forces them to move?

SOCRATES

Not at all; it's the aerial Whirlwind.

STREPSIADES

The Whirlwind! ah! I did not know that. So Zeus, it seems, has no existence, and it's the Whirlwind that reigns in his stead? But you have not yet told me what makes the roll of the thunder?

SOCRATES

Have you not understood me then? I tell you, that the Clouds, when full of rain, bump against one another, and that, being inordinately swollen out, they burst with a great noise.

STREPSIADES

How can you make me credit that?

SOCRATES

Take yourself as an example. When you have heartily gorged on stew at the Panathenæa, you get throes of stomach-ache and then suddenly your belly resounds with prolonged rumbling.

STREPSIADES

Yes, yes, by Apollo! I suffer, I get colic, then the stew sets to rumbling like thunder and finally bursts forth with a terrific noise. At first, it's but a little gurgling *pappax, pappax!* then it increases, *papapappax!* and when I take my crap, why, it's thunder indeed, *papapappax! pappax!! papapap-pax!!!* just like the clouds.

SOCRATES

Well then, reflect what a noise is produced by your belly, which is but small. Shall not the air, which is boundless, produce these mighty claps of thunder?

STREPSIADES

And this is why the names are so much alike: crap and clap. But tell me this. Whence comes the lightning, the dazzling flame, which at times consumes the man it strikes, at others hardly singses him. Is it not plain, that Zeus is hurling it at the perjurers?

SOCRATES

Out upon the fool! the driveller! he still savours of the golden age! If Zeus strikes at the perjurers, why has he not blasted Simon, Cleonymus and Theorus? Of a surety, greater perjurers cannot exist. No, he strikes his own temple, and Sunium, the promontory of Athens, and the towering oaks. Now, why should he do that? An oak is no perjurer.

STREPSIADES

I cannot tell, but it seems to me well argued. What is the lightning then?

SOCRATES

When a dry wind ascends to the Clouds and gets shut into them, it blows them out like a bladder; finally, being too confined, it bursts them, escapes with fierce violence and a roar to flash into flame by reason of its own impetuosity.

STREPSIADES

Ah, that's just what happened to me one day. It was at the feast of Zeus! I was cooking a sow's belly for my family and I had forgotten to slit it open. It swelled out and, suddenly bursting, discharged itself right into my eyes and burnt my face.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh, mortal, you who desire to instruct yourself in our great wisdom, the Athenians, the Greeks will envy you your good fortune. Only you must have the memory and ardour for study, you must know how to stand the tests, hold your own, go forward without feeling fatigue, caring but little for food, abstaining from wine, gymnastic exercises and other similar follies, in fact, you must believe as every man of intellect should, that the greatest of all blessings is to live and think more clearly than the vulgar herd, to shine in the contests of words.

## STREPSIADES

If it be a question of hardiness for labour, of spending whole nights at work, of living sparingly, of fighting my stomach and only eating chick-pease, rest assured, I am as hard as an anvil.

## SOCRATES

Henceforward, following our example, you will recognize no other gods but Chaos, the Clouds and the Tongue, these three alone.

## STREPSIADES

I would not speak to the others, even if I met them in the street; not a single sacrifice, not a libation, not a grain of incense for them!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Tell us boldly then what you want of us; you cannot fail to succeed, if you honour and revere us and if you are resolved to become a clever man.

## STREPSIADES

Oh, sovereign goddesses, it is only a very small favour that I ask of you; grant that I may outdistance all the Greeks by a hundred stadia in the art of speaking.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We grant you this, and henceforward no eloquence shall more often succeed with the people than your own.

## STREPSIADES

May the gods shield me from possessing great eloquence! That's not what I want. I want to be able to turn bad law-suits to my own advantage and to slip through the fingers of my creditors.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It shall be as you wish, for your ambitions are modest. Commit yourself fearlessly to our ministers, the sophists.

## STREPSIADES

This I will do, for I trust in you. Moreover there is no drawing back, what with these cursed horses and this marriage, which has eaten up my vitals. (*More and more volubly from here to the end of speech*) So let them do with me as they will; I yield my body to them. Come blows, come hunger, thirst, heat or cold, little matters it to me; they may flay me, if I only escape my debts, if only I win the reputation of being a bold rascal, a fine speaker, impudent, shameless, a braggart, and adept at stringing lies, an old stager at quibbles, a complete table of laws, a thorough rattle, a fox to slip through any hole; supple as a leathern strap, slippery as an eel, an artful fellow, a blusterer, a villain; a knave with a hundred faces, cunning, intolerable, a gluttonous dog. With such epithets do I seek to be greeted; on these terms they can treat me as they choose, and, if they wish, by Demeter! they can turn me into sausages and serve me up to the philosophers.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Here have we a bold and well-disposed pupil indeed. When we have taught you, your glory among the mortals will reach even to the skies.

STREPSIADES (*singing*)

Wherein will that profit me?

CHORUS (*singing*)

You will pass your whole life among us and will be the most envied of men.

STREPSIADES (*singing*)

Shall I really ever see such happiness?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Clients will be everlastingly besieging your door in crowds, burning to get at you, to explain their business to you and to consult you about their suits, which, in return for your ability, will bring you in great sums.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But, Socrates, begin the lessons you want to teach this old man; rouse his mind, try the strength of his intelligence.

## SOCRATES

Come, tell me the kind of mind you have; it's important that I know this, that I may order my batteries against you in the right fashion.

STREPSIADES

Eh, what! in the name of the gods, are you purposing to assault me then?

SOCRATES

No. I only wish to ask you some questions. Have you any memory?

STREPSIADES

That depends; if anything is owed me, my memory is excellent, but if I owe, alas! I have none whatever.

SOCRATES

Have you a natural gift for speaking?

STREPSIADES

For speaking, no; for cheating, yes.

SOCRATES

How will you be able to learn then?

STREPSIADES

Very easily, have no fear.

SOCRATES

Thus, when I throw forth some philosophical thought anent things celestial, you will seize it in its very flight?

STREPSIADES

Then I am to snap up wisdom much as a dog snaps up a morsel?

SOCRATES (*aside*)

Oh! the ignoramus! the barbarian! (*to STREPSIADES*) I greatly fear, old man, it will be necessary for me to have recourse to blows. Now, let me hear what you do when you are beaten.

STREPSIADES

I receive the blow, then wait a moment, take my witnesses and finally summon my assailant at law.

SOCRATES

Come, take off your cloak.

STREPSIADES

Have I robbed you of anything?

SOCRATES

No, but the usual thing is to enter the school without your cloak.

STREPSIADES

But I have not come here to look for stolen goods.

SOCRATES

Off with it, fool!

STREPSIADES (*He obeys.*)

Tell me, if I prove thoroughly attentive and learn with zeal, which of your disciples shall I resemble, do you think?

SOCRATES

You will be the image of Chaerephon.

STREPSIADES

Ah! unhappy me! Shall I then be only half alive?

SOCRATES

A truce to this chatter! follow me and no more of it.

STREPSIADES

First give me a honey-cake, for to descend down there sets me all a-tremble; it looks like the cave of Trophonius.

SOCRATES

But get in with you! What reason have you for thus dallying at the door?

(*They go into the Thoughtery.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Good luck! you have courage; may you succeed, you, who, though already so advanced in years, wish to instruct your mind with new studies and practise it in wisdom! (*The CHORUS turns and faces the Audience.*)

Spectators! By Bacchus, whose servant I am, I will frankly tell you the truth. May I secure both victory and renown as certainly as I hold you for adept critics and as I regard this comedy as my best. I wished to give you the first view of a work, which had cost me much trouble, but which I withdrew, unjustly beaten by unskilful rivals. It is you, oh, enlightened public, for whom I have prepared my piece, that I reproach with this. Nevertheless I shall never willingly cease to seek the approval of the discerning. I have not forgotten the day, when men, whom one is happy to have for an audience, received my Virtuous Young Man and my Pæderast with so much favour in this very place.<sup>5</sup> Then as yet virgin, my Muse had not attained the age for maternity; she had to expose her first-born for another to adopt, and it has since grown up under your generous patronage. Ever since you have as good as sworn me your faithful alliance. Thus, like the Electra of the poets, my comedy has come to seek you to-day,

hoping again to encounter such enlightened spectators. As far away as she can discern her Orestes, she will be able to recognize him by his curly head. And note her modest demeanour! She has not sewn on a piece of hanging leather, thick and reddened at the end, to cause laughter among the children; she does not rail at the bald, neither does she dance the *cordax*; no old man is seen, who, while uttering his lines, batters his questioner with a stick to make his poor jests pass muster. She does not rush upon the scene carrying a torch and screaming, 'Iou! Iou!' No, she relies upon herself and her verses. . . . My value is so well known, that I take no further pride in it. I do not seek to deceive you, by reproducing the same subjects two or three times; I always invent fresh themes to present before you, themes that have no relation to each other and that are all clever. I attacked Cleon to his face and when he was all-powerful; but he has fallen, and now I have no desire to kick him when he is down. My rivals, on the contrary, now that this wretched Hyperbolus has given them the cue, have never ceased setting upon both him and his mother. First Eupolis presented his 'Maricas'; this was simply my 'Knights,' whom this plagiarist had clumsily furbished up again by adding to the piece an old drunken woman, so that she might dance the *cordax*. It was an old idea, taken from Phrynichus, who caused his old hag to be devoured by a monster of the deep. Then Hermippus fell foul of Hyperbolus and now all the others fall upon him and repeat my comparison of the eels. May those who find amusement in their pieces not be pleased with mine, but as for you, who love and applaud my inventions, why, posterity will praise your good taste.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, ruler of Olympus, all-powerful king of the gods, great Zeus, it is thou whom I first invoke; protect this chorus; and thou too, Posidon, whose dread trident upheaves at the will of thy anger both the bowels of the earth and the salty waves of the ocean. I invoke my illustrious father, the divine Aether, the universal sustainer of life, and Phoebus, who, from the summit of his chariot, sets the world aflame with his dazzling rays, Phoebus, a mighty deity amongst the gods and adored amongst mortals.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Most wise spectators, lend us all your attention. Give heed to our just reproaches. There exist no gods to whom this city owes more than it does to us, whom alone you forget. Not a sacrifice, not a libation is there for those who protect you! Have you decreed some mad expedition? Well! we thunder or we fall down in rain. When you chose that enemy of heaven, the Paphlagonian tanner, for a general, we knitted our brow, we caused our wrath to break out; the lightning shot forth, the thunder pealed, the



moon deserted her course and the sun at once veiled his beam threatening no longer to give you light, if Cleon became general. Nevertheless you elected him; it is said, Athens never resolves upon some fatal step but the gods turn these errors into her greatest gain. Do you wish that his election should even now be a success for you? It is a very simple thing to do; condemn this rapacious gull named Cleon for bribery and extortion, fit a wooden collar tight round his neck, and your error will be rectified and the commonweal will at once regain its old prosperity.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Aid me also, Phoebus, god of Delos, who reignest on the cragged peaks of Cynthia; and thou, happy virgin, to whom the Lydian damsels offer pompous sacrifice in a temple of gold; and thou, goddess of our country, Athené, armed with the aegis, the protectress of Athens; and thou, who, surrounded by the bacchants of Delphi; roamest over the rocks of Parnassus shaking the flame of thy resinous torch, thou, Bacchus, the god of revel and joy.

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

As we were preparing to come here, we were hailed by the Moon and were charged to wish joy and happiness both to the Athenians and to their allies; further, she said that she was enraged and that you treated her very shamefully, her, who does not pay you in words alone, but who renders you all real benefits. Firstly, thanks to her, you save at least a drachma each month for lights, for each, as he is leaving home at night, says, "Slave, buy no torches, for the moonlight is beautiful,"—not to name a thousand other benefits. Nevertheless you do not reckon the days correctly and your calendar is naught but confusion. Consequently the gods load her with threats each time they get home and are disappointed of their meal, because the festival has not been kept in the regular order of time. When you should be sacrificing, you are putting to the torture or administering justice. And often, we others, the gods, are fasting in token of mourning for the death of Memnon or Sarpedon, while you are devoting yourselves to joyous libations. It is for this, that last year, when the lot would have invested Hyperbolus with the duty of Amphictyon, we took his crown from him, to teach him that time must be divided according to the phases of the moon.

SOCRATES (*coming out*)

By Respiration, the Breath of Life! By Chaos! By the Air! I have never seen a man so gross, so inept, so stupid, so forgetful. All the little quibbles, which I teach him, he forgets even before he has learnt them. Yet I will not give it up, I will make him come out here into the open air. Where are you, Strepsiades? Come, bring your couch out here.

STREPSIADES (*from within*)

But the bugs will not allow me to bring it.

SOCRATES

Have done with such nonsense! place it there and pay attention.

STREPSIADES (*coming out, with the bed*)

Well, here I am.

SOCRATES

Good! Which science of all those you have never been taught, do you wish to learn first? The measures, the rhythms or the verses?

STREPSIADES

Why, the measures; the flour dealer cheated me out of two *chocnixes* the other day.

SOCRATES

It's not about that I ask you, but which, according to you, is the best measure, the trimeter or the tetrameter?

STREPSIADES

The one I prefer is the semisextarius.<sup>6</sup>

SOCRATES

You talk nonsense, my good fellow.

STREPSIADES

I will wager your tetrameter is the semisextarius.

SOCRATES

Plague seize the dunce and the fool! Come, perchance you will learn the rhythms quicker.

STREPSIADES

Will the rhythms supply me with food?

SOCRATES

First they will help you to be pleasant in company, then to know what is meant by enhoplian rhythm and what by the dactylic.

STREPSIADES

Of the dactyl? I know that quite well.

SOCRATES

What is it then, other than this finger here? <sup>7</sup>

STREPSIADES

Formerly, when a child, I used this one.

SOCRATES

You are as low-minded as you are stupid.

STREPSIADES

But, wretched man, I do not want to learn all this.

SOCRATES

Then what *do* you want to know?

STREPSIADES

Not that, not that, but the art of false reasoning.

SOCRATES

But you must first learn other things. Come, what are the male quadrupeds?

STREPSIADES

Oh! I know the males thoroughly. Do you take me for a fool then? The ram, the buck, the bull, the dog, the pigeon.

SOCRATES

Do you see what you are doing; is not the female pigeon called the same as the male?

STREPSIADES

How else? Come now!

SOCRATES

How else? With you then it's pigeon and pigeon!

STREPSIADES

That's right, by Posidon! but what names do you want me to give them?

SOCRATES

Term the female pigeonnette and the male pigeon.

STREPSIADES

Pigeonnette! hah! by the Air! That's splendid! for that lesson bring out your kneading-trough and I will fill him with flour to the brim.

SOCRATES

There you are wrong again; you make *trough* masculine and it should be feminine.

STREPSIADES

What? if I say, *him*, do I make the *trough* masculine?

SOCRATES

Assuredly! would you not say him for Cleonymus?

STREPSIADES

Well?

SOCRATES

Then trough is of the same gender as Cleonymus?

STREPSIADES

My good man! Cleonymus never had a kneading-trough; he used a round mortar for the purpose. But come, tell me what I *should* say!

SOCRATES

For trough you should say *her* as you would for Sostraté.

STREPSIADES

*Her*?

SOCRATES

In this manner you make it truly female.

STREPSIADES

That's it! *Her* for trough and *her* for Cleonymus.

SOCRATES

Now I must teach you to distinguish the masculine proper names from those that are feminine.

STREPSIADES

Ah! I know the female names well.

SOCRATES

Name some then.

STREPSIADES

Lysilla, Philinna, Clitagora, Demetria.

SOCRATES

And what are masculine names?

STREPSIADES

They are countless—Philoxenus, Melesias, Amynias.

SOCRATES

But, wretched man, the last two are not masculine.

STREPSIADES

You do not count them as masculine?

SOCRATES

Not at all. If you met Amynias, how would you hail him?

STREPSIADES

How? Why, I should shout, "Hi, there, Amynia!"

SOCRATES

Do you see? it's a female name that you give him.

STREPSIADES

And is it not rightly done, since he refuses military service? But what use is there in learning what we all know?

SOCRATES

You know nothing about it. Come, lie down there.

STREPSIADES

What for?

SOCRATES

Ponder awhile over matters that interest you.

STREPSIADES

Oh! I pray you, not there! but, if I must lie down and ponder, let me lie on the ground.

SOCRATES

That's out of the question. Come! on the couch!

STREPSIADES (*as he lies down*)

What cruel fate! What a torture the bugs will this day put me to!  
(*Socrates turns aside.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ponder and examine closely, gather your thoughts together, let your mind turn to every side of things; if you meet with a difficulty, spring quickly to some other idea; above all, keep your eyes away from all gentle sleep.

STREPSIADES (*singing*)

Ow, Wow, Wow, Wow is me!

CHORUS (*singing*)

What ails you? why do you cry so?

STREPSIADES

Oh! I am a dead man! Here are these cursed Corinthians<sup>9</sup> advancing upon me from all corners of the couch; they are biting me, they are gnawing at my sides, they are drinking all my blood, they are yanking off my balls, they are digging into my arse, they are killing me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Not so much wailing and clamour, if you please.

STREPSIADES

How can I obey? I have lost my money and my complexion, my blood and my slippers, and to cap my misery, I must keep awake on this couch, when scarce a breath of life is left in me.

(*A brief interval of silence ensues.*)

SOCRATES

Well now! what are you doing? are you reflecting?

STREPSIADES

Yes, by Posidon!

SOCRATES

What about?

STREPSIADES

Whether the bugs will entirely devour me.

SOCRATES

May death seize you, accursed man!

(*He turns aside again.*)

STREPSIADES

Ah! it has already.

SOCRATES

Come, no giving way! Cover up your head; the thing to do is to find an ingenious alternative.

STREPSIADES

An alternative! ah! I only wish one would come to me from within these coverlets!

(*Another interval of silence ensues.*)

SOCRATES

Wait! let us see what our fellow is doing! Ho! you, are you asleep?

STREPSIADES

No, by Apollo!

SOCRATES

Have you got hold of anything?

STREPSIADES

No, nothing whatever.

SOCRATES

Nothing at all?

STREPSIADES

No, nothing except my tool, which I've got in my hand.

SOCRATES

Aren't you going to cover your head immediately and ponder?

STREPSIADES

On what? Come, Socrates, tell me.

SOCRATES

Think first what you want, and then tell me.

STREPSIADES

But I have told you a thousand times what I want. Not to pay any of my creditors.

SOCRATES

Come, wrap yourself up; concentrate your mind, which wanders too lightly; study every detail, scheme and examine thoroughly.

STREPSIADES

Alas! Alas!

SOCRATES

Keep still, and if any notion troubles you, put it quickly aside, then resume it and think over it again.

STREPSIADES

My *dear* little Socrates!

SOCRATES

What is it, old greybeard?

STREPSIADES

I have a scheme for not paying my debts.

SOCRATES

Let us hear it.

STREPSIADES

Tell me, if I purchased a Thessalian witch, I could make the moon descend during the night and shut it, like a mirror, into a round box and there keep it carefully. . . .

SOCRATES

How would you gain by that?

STREPSIADES

How? why, if the moon did not rise, I would have no interest to pay.

SOCRATES

Why so?

STREPSIADES

Because money is lent by the month.

SOCRATES

Good! but I am going to propose another trick to you. If you were condemned to pay five talents, how would you manage to quash that verdict? Tell me.

STREPSIADES

How? how? I don't know, I must think.

SOCRATES

Do you always shut your thoughts within yourself? Let your ideas fly in the air, like a may-bug, tied by the foot with a thread.

STREPSIADES

I have found a very clever way to annul that conviction; you will admit that much yourself.

SOCRATES

What is it?

STREPSIADES

Have you ever seen a beautiful, transparent stone at the druggists' with which you may kindle fire?

SOCRATES

You mean a crystal lens.



STREPSIADES

That's right. Well, now if I placed myself with this stone in the sun and a long way off from the clerk, while he was writing out the conviction, I could make all the wax, upon which the words were written, melt.

SOCRATES

Well thought out, by the Graces!

STREPSIADES

Ah! I am delighted to have annulled the decree that was to cost me five talents.

SOCRATES

Come, take up this next question quickly.

STREPSIADES

Which?

SOCRATES

If, when summoned to court, you were in danger of losing your case for want of witnesses, how would you make the conviction fall upon your opponent?

STREPSIADES

That's very simple and easy.

SOCRATES

Let me hear.

STREPSIADES

This way. If another case had to be pleaded before mine was called, I should run and hang myself.

SOCRATES

You talk rubbish!

STREPSIADES

Not so, by the gods! if I were dead, no action could lie against me.

SOCRATES

You are merely beating the air. Get out! I will give you no more lessons.

STREPSIADES (*imploringly*)

Why not? Oh! Socrates! in the name of the gods'

SOCRATES

But you forget as fast as you learn. Come, what was the thing I taught you first? Tell me.

STREPSIADES

Ah! let me see. What was the first thing? What was it then? Ah! that thing in which we knead the bread, oh! my god! what do you call it?

SOCRATES

Plague take the most forgetful and silliest of old addlepaters!

STREPSIADES

Alas! what a calamity! what will become of me? I am undone if I do not learn how to ply my tongue. Oh! Clouds! give me good advice.

CHORUS-LEADER

Old man, we counsel you, if you have brought up a son, to send him to learn in your stead.

STREPSIADES

Undoubtedly I have a son, as well endowed as the best, but he is unwilling to learn. What will become of me?

CHORUS-LEADER

And you don't make him obey you?

STREPSIADES

You see, he is big and strong; moreover, through his mother he is a descendant of those fine birds, the race of Coesyra. Nevertheless, I will go and find him, and if he refuses, I will turn him out of the house. Go in, Socrates, and wait for me awhile.

(SOCRATES goes into the *Thoughtery*, STREPSIADES into his own house.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Do you understand, Socrates, that thanks to us you will be loaded with benefits? Here is a man, ready to obey you in all things. You see how he is carried away with admiration and enthusiasm. Profit by it to clip him as short as possible; fine chances are all too quickly gone.

STREPSIADES (*coming out of his house and pushing his son in front of him*)

No, by the Clouds! you stay here no longer; go and devour the ruins of your uncle Megacles' fortune.

PHIDIPIDES

Oh! my poor father! what has happened to you? By the Olympian Zeus! you are no longer in your senses!

STREPSIADES

Look! "the Olympian Zeus." Oh! you fool! to believe in Zeus at your age!

PHIDIPPIDES

What is there in that to make you laugh?

STREPSIADES

You are then a tiny little child, if you credit such antiquated rubbish! But come here, that I may teach you; I will tell you something very necessary to know to be a man; but do not repeat it to anybody.

PHIDIPPIDES

Tell me, what is it?

STREPSIADES

Just now you swore by Zeus.

PHIDIPPIDES

Sure I did.

STREPSIADES

Do you see how good it is to learn? Phidippides, there is no Zeus.

PHIDIPPIDES

What is there then?

STREPSIADES

The Whirlwind has driven out Zeus and is King now.

PHIDIPPIDES

What drivel!

STREPSIADES

You must realize that it is true.

PHIDIPPIDES

And who says so?

STREPSIADES

Socrates, the Melian, and Chaerephon, who knows how to measure the jump of a flea.

PHIDIPPIDES

Have you reached such a pitch of madness that you believe those bilious fellows?

STREPSIADES

Use better language, and do not insult men who are clever and full of wisdom, who, to economize, never shave, shun the gymnasia and never go to the baths, while you, you only await my death to eat up my wealth. But come, come as quickly as you can to learn in my stead.

PHIDIPPIDES

And what good can be learnt of them?

STREPSIADES

What good indeed? Why, all human knowledge. Firstly, you will know yourself grossly ignorant. But await me here awhile.

*(He goes back into his house.)*

PHIDIPPIDES

Alas! what is to be done? Father has lost his wits. Must I have him certificated for lunacy, or must I order his coffin?

STREPSIADES *(returning with a bird in each hand)*

Come! what kind of bird is this? Tell me.

PHIDIPPIDES

A pigeon.

STREPSIADES

Good! And this female?

PHIDIPPIDES

A pigeon.

STREPSIADES

The same for both? You make me laugh! In the future you must call this one a pigeonnee and the other a pigeon.

PHIDIPPIDES

A pigeonnee! These then are the fine things you have just learnt at the school of these sons of Earth! <sup>10</sup>

STREPSIADES

And many others; but what I learnt I forgot at once, because I am too old.

PHIDIPPIDES

So this is why you have lost your cloak?

STREPSIADES

I have not lost it, I have consecrated it to Philosophy.

PHIDIPPIDES

And what have you done with your sandals, you poor fool?

STREPSIADES

If I have lost them, it is for what was necessary, just as Pericles did. But come, move yourself, let us go in; if necessary, do wrong to obey your father. When you were six years old and still lisped, I was the one who obeyed you. I remember at the feasts of Zeus you had a consuming wish for a little chariot and I bought it for you with the first obolus which I received as a jurymen in the courts.

PHIDIPPIDES

You will soon repent of what you ask me to do.

STREPSIADES

Oh! now I am happy! He obeys. (*loudly*) Come, Socrates, come! Come out quick! Here I am bringing you my son; he refused, but I have persuaded him.

SOCRATES

Why, he is but a child yet. He is not used to these baskets, in which we suspend our minds.

PHIDIPPIDES

To make you better used to them, I would you were hung.

STREPSIADES

A curse upon you! you insult your master!

SOCRATES

"I would you were hung!" What a stupid speech! and so emphatically spoken! How can one ever get out of an accusation with such a tone, summon witnesses or touch or convince? And yet when we think, Hyperbolus learnt all this for one talent!

STREPSIADES

Rest undisturbed and teach him. He has a most intelligent nature. Even when quite little he amused himself at home with making houses, carving boats, constructing little chariots of leather, and understood wonderfully how to make frogs out of pomegranate rinds. Teach him both methods of reasoning, the strong and also the weak, which by false arguments triumphs over the strong; if not the two, at least the false, and that in every possible way.

## SOCRATES

The Just and Unjust Discourse themselves shall instruct him. I shall leave you.

## STREPSIADES

But forget it not, he must always, always be able to confound the true.  
*(Socrates enters the Thoughtery; a moment later the JUST and the UN-  
 JUST DISCOURSE come out; they are quarrelling violently.)*

## JUST DISCOURSE

Come here! Shameless as you may be, will you dare to show your face to the spectators?

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Take me where you will. I seek a throng, so that I may the better annihilate you.

## JUST DISCOURSE

Annihilate me! Do you forget who you are?

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

I am Reasoning.

## JUST DISCOURSE

Yes, the weaker Reasoning.<sup>11</sup>

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

But I triumph over you, who claim to be the stronger.

## JUST DISCOURSE

By what cunning shifts, pray?

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

By the invention of new maxims.

## JUST DISCOURSE

. . . which are received with favour by these fools.

*(He points to the audience)*

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Say rather, by these wise men.

## JUST DISCOURSE

I am going to destroy you mercilessly.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

How pray? Let us see you do it.

## JUST DISCOURSE

By saying what is true.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

I shall retort and shall very soon have the better of you. First, I maintain that justice has no existence.

## JUST DISCOURSE

Has no existence?

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

No existence! Why, where is it?

## JUST DISCOURSE

With the gods.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

How then, if justice exists, was Zeus not put to death for having put his father in chains?

## JUST DISCOURSE

Bah! this is enough to turn my stomach! A basin, quick!

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

You are an old driveller and stupid withal.

## JUST DISCOURSE

And you a degenerate and shameless fellow.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Hah! What sweet expressions!

## JUST DISCOURSE

An impious buffoon.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

You crown me with roses and with lilies.

## JUST DISCOURSE

A parricide.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Why, you shower gold upon me.

## JUST DISCOURSE

Formerly it was a hailstorm of blows.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

I deck myself with your abuse.

## JUST DISCOURSE

What impudence!

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

What tomfoolery!

## JUST DISCOURSE

It is because of you that the youth no longer attends the schools. The Athenians will soon recognize what lessons you teach those who are fools enough to believe you.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

You are overwhelmed with wretchedness.

## JUST DISCOURSE

And you, you prosper. Yet you were poor when you said, "I am the Mysian Telephus," and used to stuff your wallet with maxims of Pandetus to nibble at.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Oh! the beautiful wisdom, of which you are now boasting!

## JUST DISCOURSE

Madman! But yet madder the city that keeps you, you, the corrupter of its youth!

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

It is not you who will teach this young man; you are as old and out of date at Cronus.

## JUST DISCOURSE

Nay, it will certainly be I, if he does not wish to be lost and to practise verbosity only.

UNJUST DISCOURSE (*to PHILIPPIDES*)

Come here and leave him to beat the air.

## JUST DISCOURSE

You'll regret it, if you touch him.

CHORUS-LEADER (*stepping between them as they are about to come to blows*)

A truce to your quarrellings and abuse! But you expound what you taught us formerly, and you, your new doctrine. Thus, after hearing each of you argue, he will be able to choose betwixt the two schools.



## JUST DISCOURSE

I am quite agreeable.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

And I too.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Who is to speak first?

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Let it be my opponent, he has my full consent; then I shall follow upon the very ground he shall have chosen and shall shatter him with a hail of new ideas and subtle fancies; if after that he dares to breathe another word, I shall sting him in the face and in the eyes with our maxims, which are as keen as the sting of a wasp, and he will die.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Here are two rivals confident in their powers of oratory and in the thoughts over which they have pondered so long. Let us see which will come triumphant out of the contest. This wisdom, for which my friends maintain such a persistent fight, is in great danger.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come then, you, who crowned men of other days with so many virtues, plead the cause dear to you, make yourself known to us.

## JUST DISCOURSE

Very well, I will tell you what was the old education, when I used to teach justice with so much success and when modesty was held in veneration. Firstly, it was required of a child, that it should not utter a word. In the street, when they went to the music-school, all the youths of the same district marched lightly clad and ranged in good order, even when the snow was falling in great flakes. At the master's house they had to stand with their legs apart and they were taught to sing either, "Pallas, the Terrible, who overturneth cities," or "A noise resounded from afar" in the solemn tones of the ancient harmony. If anyone indulged in buffoonery or lent his voice any of the soft inflexions, like those which to-day the disciples of Phrynis take so much pains to form, he was treated as an enemy of the Muses and belaboured with blows. In the wrestling school they would sit with outstretched legs and without display of any indecency to the curious. When they rose, they would smooth over the sand, so as to leave no trace to excite obscene thoughts. Never was a child rubbed with oil below the belt; the rest of their bodies thus retained its fresh bloom and down, like a velvety peach. They were not to be seen approaching a lover and themselves rousing his passion by soft modulation of the voice

and lustful gaze. At table, they would not have dared, before those older than themselves, to have taken a radish, an aniseed or a leaf of parsley, and much less eat fish or thrushes or cross their legs.

#### UNJUST DISCOURSE

What antiquated rubbish! Have we got back to the days of the festivals of Zeus Polieus, to the Buphonia, to the time of the poet Cecides and the golden cicadas?

#### JUST DISCOURSE

Nevertheless by suchlike teaching I built up the men of Marathon. But you, you teach the children of to-day to bundle themselves quickly into their clothes, and I am enraged when I see them at the Panathenæa forgetting Athené while they dance, and covering their tools with their bucklers. Hence, young man, dare to range yourself beside me, who follow justice and truth; you will then be able to shun the public place, to refrain from the baths, to blush at all that is shameful, to fire up if your virtue is mocked at, to give place to your elders, to honour your parents, in short, to avoid all that is evil. Be modesty itself, and do not run to applaud the dancing girls; if you delight in such scenes, some courtesan will cast you her apple and your reputation will be done for. Do not bandy words with your father, nor treat him as a dotard, nor reproach the old man, who has cherished you, with his age.

#### UNJUST DISCOURSE

If you listen to him, by Bacchus! you will be the image of the sons of Hippocrates and will be called *mother's big ninny*.

#### JUST DISCOURSE

No, but you will pass your days at the gymnasia, glowing with strength and health; you will not go to the public place to cackle and wrangle as is done nowadays; you will not live in fear that you may be dragged before the courts for some trifle exaggerated by quibbling. But you will go down to the Academy to run beneath the sacred olives with some virtuous friend of your own age, your head encircled with the white reed, enjoying your ease and breathing the perfume of the yew and of the fresh sprouts of the poplar, rejoicing in the return of springtide and gladly listening to the gentle rustle of the plane tree and the elm. (*With greater warmth from here on*) If you devote yourself to practising my precepts, your chest will be stout, your colour glowing, your shoulders broad, your tongue short, your hips muscular, but your tool small. But if you follow the fashions of the day, you will be pallid in hue, have narrow shoulders, a narrow chest, a long tongue, small hips and a big thing; you will know how to spin forth long-winded arguments on law. You will be persuaded also to regard as

splendid everything that is shameful and as shameful everything that is honourable; in a word, you will wallow in degeneracy like Antimachus.

CHORUS (*singing*)

How beautiful, high-souled, brilliant is this wisdom that you practise! What a sweet odour of honesty is emitted by your discourse! Happy were those men of other days who lived when you were honoured! And you, seductive talker, come, find some fresh arguments, for your rival has done wonders.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You will have to bring out against him all the battery of your wit, if you desire to beat him and not to be laughed out of court.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

At last! I was choking with impatience, I was burning to upset his arguments! If I am called the Weaker Reasoning in the schools, it is just because I was the first to discover the means to confute the laws and the decrees of justice. To invoke solely the weaker arguments and yet triumph is an art worth more than a hundred thousand drachmae. But see how I shall batter down the sort of education of which he is so proud. Firstly, he forbids you to bathe in hot water. What grounds have you for condemning hot baths?

JUST DISCOURSE

Because they are baneful and enervate men.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Enough said! Oh! you poor wrestler! From the very outset I have seized you and hold you round the middle; you cannot escape me. Tell me, of all the sons of Zeus, who had the stoutest heart, who performed the most doughty deeds?

JUST DISCOURSE

None, in my opinion, surpassed Heracles.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Where have you ever seen cold baths called 'Bath of Heracles'? And yet who was braver than he?

JUST DISCOURSE

It is because of such quibbles, that the baths are seen crowded with young folk, who chatter there the livelong day while the gymnasia remain empty.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Next you condemn the habit of frequenting the market-place, while I approve this. If it were wrong Homer would never have made Nestor speak in public as well as all his wise heroes. As for the art of speaking, he tells you, young men should not practise it; I hold the contrary. Furthermore he preaches chastity to them. Both precepts are equally harmful. Have you ever seen chastity of any use to anyone? Answer and try to confute me.

## JUST DISCOURSE

To many; for instance, Peleus won a sword thereby.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

A sword! Ah! what a fine present to make him! Poor wretch! Hyperbolus, the lamp-seller, thanks to his villainy, has gained more than . . . I do not know how many talents, but certainly no sword.

## JUST DISCOURSE

Peleus owed it to his chastity that he became the husband of Thetis.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

. . . who left him in the lurch, for he was not the most ardent; in those nocturnal sports between the sheets, which so please women, he possessed but little merit. Get you gone, you are but an old fool. But you, young man, just consider a little what this temperance means and the delights of which it deprives you—young fellows, women, play, dainty dishes, wine, boisterous laughter. And what is life worth without these? Then, if you happen to commit one of these faults inherent in human weakness, some seduction or adultery, and you are caught in the act, you are lost, if you cannot speak. But follow my teaching and you will be able to satisfy your passions, to dance, to laugh, to blush at nothing. Suppose you are caught in the act of adultery. Then up and tell the husband you are not guilty, and recall to him the example of Zeus, who allowed himself to be conquered by love and by women. Being but a mortal, can you be stronger than a god?

## JUST DISCOURSE

Suppose your pupil, following your advice, gets the radish rammed up his arse and then is depilated with a hot coal;<sup>12</sup> how are you going to prove to him that he is not a broad-arse? <sup>13</sup>

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

What's the matter with being a broad-arse?

## JUST DISCOURSE

Is there anything worse than that?

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Now what will you say, if I beat you even on this point?

## JUST DISCOURSE

I should certainly have to be silent then.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well then, reply! Our advocates, what are they?

## JUST DISCOURSE

Sons of broad-arses.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Nothing is more true. And our tragic poets?

## JUST DISCOURSE

Sons of broad-arses.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well said again. And our demagogues?

## JUST DISCOURSE

Sons of broad-arses.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

You admit that you have spoken nonsense. And the spectators, what are they for the most part? Look at them.

## JUST DISCOURSE

I am looking at them.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well! What do you see?

## JUST DISCOURSE

By the gods, they are nearly all broad-arses. (*pointing*) See, this one I know to be such and that one and that other with the long hair.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

What have you to say, then?

## JUST DISCOURSE

I am beaten. Debauchees! in the name of the gods, receive my cloak; I pass over to your ranks.

(*He goes back into the Thoughtery.*)

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well then! Are you going to take away your son or do you wish me to teach him how to speak?

## STREPSIADES

Teach him, chastise him and do not fail to sharpen his tongue well, on one side for petty law-suits and on the other for important cases.

## UNJUST DISCOURSE

Don't worry, I shall return him to you an accomplished sophist.

## PHIDIPPIDES

Very pale then and thoroughly hang-dog-looking.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Take him with you. (*The UNJUST DISCOURSE and PHIDIPPIDES go into the THOUGHTERY. To STREPSIADES, who is just going into his own house.*) I think you will regret this. (*The CHORUS turns and faces the audience.*) Judges, we are all about to tell you what you will gain by awarding us the crown as equity requires of you. In spring, when you wish to give your fields the first dressing, we will rain upon you first; the others shall wait. Then we will watch over your corn and over your vine-stocks; they will have no excess to fear, neither of heat nor of wet. But if a mortal dares to insult the goddesses of the Clouds, let him think of the ills we shall pour upon him. For him neither wine nor any harvest at all! Our terrible slings will mow down his young olive plants and his vines. If he is making bricks, it will rain, and our round hailstones will break the tiles of his roof. If he himself marries or any of his relations or friends, we shall cause rain to fall the whole night long. Verily, he would prefer to live in Egypt than to have given this iniquitous verdict.

STREPSIADES (*coming out again*)

Another four, three, two days, then the eve, then the day, the fatal day of payment! I tremble, I quake, I shudder, for it's the day of the old moon and the new. Then all my creditors take the oath, pay their deposits,<sup>11</sup> swear my downfall and my ruin. As for me, I beseech them to be reasonable, to be just, "My friend, do not demand this sum, wait a little for this other and give me time for this third one." Then they will pretend that at this rate they will never be repaid, will accuse me of bad faith and will threaten me with the law. Well then, let them sue me! I care nothing for that, if only Phidippides has learnt to speak fluently. I am going to find out; I'll knock at the door of the school. (*He knocks.*) . . . Ho! slave, slave!

SOCRATES (*coming out*)

Welcome! Strepsiades!

STREPSIADES

Welcome! Socrates! But first take this sack (*offers him a sack of flour*); it is right to reward the master with some present. And my son, whom you took off lately, has he learnt this famous reasoning? Tell me.

SOCRATES

He has learnt it.

STREPSIADES

Wonderful! Oh! divine Knavery!

SOCRATES

You will win just as many causes as you choose.

STREPSIADES

Even if I have borrowed before witnesses?

SOCRATES

So much the better, even if there are a thousand of them!

STREPSIADES (*bursting into song*)

Then I am going to shout with all my might. "Woe to the usurers, woe to their capital and their interest and their compound interest! You shall play me no more bad turns. My son is being taught there, his tongue is being sharpened into a double-edged weapon; he is my defender, the saviour of my house, the ruin of my foes! His poor father was crushed down with misfortune and he delivers him." Go and call him to me quickly. Oh! my child! my dear little one! run forward to your father's voice!

SOCRATES (*singing*)

Lo, the man himself'

STREPSIADES (*singing*)

Oh, my friend, my dearest friend!

SOCRATES (*singing*)

Take your son, and get you gone.

STREPSIADES (*as PHIDIPIDES appears*)

Oh, my son! oh! oh! what a pleasure to see your pallor! You are ready first to deny and then to contradict; it's as clear as noon. What a child of your country you are! How your lips quiver with the famous, "What have you to say now?" How well you know, I am certain, to put on the

look of a victim, when it is you who are making both victims and dupes! And what a truly Attic glance! Come, it's for you to save me, seeing it is you who have ruined me.

PHIDIPPIDES

What is it you fear then?

STREPSIADES

The day of the old and the new.

PHIDIPPIDES

Is there then a day of the old and the new?

STREPSIADES

The day on which they threaten to pay deposit against me.<sup>11</sup>

PHIDIPPIDES

Then so much the worse for those who have deposited! for it's not possible for one day to be two.

STREPSIADES

What?

PHIDIPPIDES

Why, undoubtedly, unless a woman can be both old and young at the same time.

STREPSIADES

But so runs the law.

PHIDIPPIDES

I think the meaning of the law is quite misunderstood.

STREPSIADES

What does it mean?

PHIDIPPIDES

Old Solon loved the people.

STREPSIADES

What has that to do with the old day and the new?

PHIDIPPIDES

He has fixed two days for the summons, the last day of the old moon and the first day of the new; but the deposits must only be paid on the first day of the new moon.



STREPSIADES

And why did he also name the last day of the old?

PHIDIPPIDES

So, my dear sir, that the debtors, being there the day before, might free themselves by mutual agreement, or that else, if not, the creditor might begin his action on the morning of the new moon.

STREPSIADES

Why then do the magistrates have the deposits paid on the last of the month and not the next day?

PHIDIPPIDES

I think they do as the gluttons do, who are the first to pounce upon the dishes. Being eager to carry off these deposits, they have them paid in a day too soon.

STREPSIADES

Splendid! (*to the audience*) Ah! you poor brutes, who serve for food to us clever folk! You are only down here to swell the number, true block-heads, sheep for shearing, heap of empty pots! Hence I will sing a song of victory for my son and myself. "Oh! happy, Strepsiadēs! what cleverness is thine! and what a son thou hast here!" Thus my friends and my neighbours will say, jealous at seeing me gain all my suits. But come in, I wish to regale you first.

(*They both go in. A moment later a creditor arrives, with his witness.*)

PASIAS (*to the WITNESS*)

A man should never lend a single obolus. It would be better to put on a brazen face at the outset than to get entangled in such matters. I want to see my money again and I bring you here to-day to attest the loan. I am going to make a foe of a neighbour; but, as long as I live, I do not wish my country to have to blush for me. Come, I am going to summon Strepsiadēs. . . .

STREPSIADES (*coming out of his house*)

Who is this?

PASIAS

. . . . for the old day and the new.

STREPSIADES (*to the WITNESS*)

I call you to witness, that he has named two days. What do you want of me?

PASIAS

I claim of you the twelve minae, which you borrowed from me to buy the dapple-grey horse.

STREPSIADES

A horse! do you hear him? I, who detest horses, as is well known.

PASIAS

I call Zeus to witness, that you swore by the gods to return them to me.

STREPSIADES

Because at that time, by Zeus! Phidippides did not yet know the irrefutable argument.

PASIAS

Would you deny the debt on that account?

STREPSIADES

If not, what use is his science to me?

PASIAS

Will you dare to swear by the gods that you owe me nothing?

STREPSIADES

By which gods?

PASIAS

By Zeus, Hermes and Posidon!

STREPSIADES

Why, I would give three obols for the pleasure of swearing by them.

PASIAS

Woe upon you, impudent knave!

STREPSIADES

Oh! what a fine wine-skin you would make if flayed!

PASIAS

Heaven! he jeers at me!

STREPSIADES

It would hold six gallons easily.

PASIAS

By great Zeus! by all the gods! you shall not scoff at me with impunity.

STREPSIADES

Ah! how you amuse me with your gods! how ridiculous it seems to a sage to hear Zeus invoked.

PASIAS

Your blasphemies will one day meet their reward. But, come, will you repay me my money, yes or no? Answer me, that I may go.

STREPSIADES

Wait a moment, I am going to give you a distinct answer. (*He goes in-doors and returns immediately with a kneading-trough.*)

PASIAS (*to the* WITNESS)

What do you think he will do? Do you think he will pay?

STREPSIADES

Where is the man who demands money? Tell me, what is this?

PASIAS

Him? Why, he is your kneading-trough.

STREPSIADES

And you dare to demand money of me, when you are so ignorant? I will not return an obolus to anyone who says *him* instead of *her* for a kneading-trough.

PASIAS

You will not repay?

STREPSIADES

Not if I know it. Come, an end to this, pack off as quick as you can.

PASIAS

I go, but, may I die, if it be not to pay my deposit for a summons.

(*Exit*)

STREPSIADES

Very well! It will be so much more loss to add to the twelve minæ. But truly it makes me sad, for I do pity a poor simpleton who says *him* for a kneading-trough

(*Another creditor arrives.*)

AMYNIAS

Woe! ah woe is me!

STREPSIADES

Wait! who is this whining fellow? Can it be one of the gods of Carcinus?

AMYNIAS

Do you want to know who I am? I am a man of misfortune!

STREPSIADES

Get on your way then.

AMYNIAS (*in tragic style*)

Oh! cruel god! Oh Fate, who hast broken the wheels of my chariot! Oh, Pallas, thou hast undone me!

STREPSIADES

What ill has Tlepolemus done you?

AMYNIAS

Instead of jeering me, friend, make your son return me the money he has had of me; I am already unfortunate enough.

STREPSIADES

What money?

AMYNIAS

The money he borrowed of me.

STREPSIADES

You have indeed had misfortune, it seems to me.

AMYNIAS

Yes, by the gods! I have been thrown from a chariot.

STREPSIADES

Why then drivell as if you had fallen off an ass? <sup>15</sup>

AMYNIAS

Am I drivelling because I demand my money?

STREPSIADES

No, no, you cannot be in your right senses.

AMYNIAS

Why?

STREPSIADES

No doubt your poor wits have had a shake.

AMYNIAS

But by Hermes! I will sue you at law, if you do not pay me.

STREPSIADES

Just tell me; do you think it is always fresh water that Zeus lets fall every time it rains, or is it always the same water that the sun pumps over the earth?

AMYNIAS

I neither know, nor care.

STREPSIADES

And actually you would claim the right to demand your money, when you know not an iota of these celestial phenomena?

AMYNIAS

If you are short, pay me the interest anyway.

STREPSIADES

What kind of animal is interest?

AMYNIAS

What? Does not the sum borrowed go on growing, growing every month, each day as the time slips by?

STREPSIADES

Well put. But do you believe there is more water in the sea now than there was formerly?

AMYNIAS

No, it's just the same quantity. It cannot increase.

STREPSIADES

Thus, poor fool, the sea, that receives the rivers, never grows, and yet you would have your money grow? Get you gone, away with you, quick! Slave! bring me the ox-goad!

AMYNIAS

I have witnesses to this.

STREPSIADES

Come, what are you waiting for? Will you not budge, old nag!

AMYNIAS

What an insult!

STREPSIADES

Unless you start trotting, I shall catch you and stick this in your arse, you sorry packhorse! (AMYNIAS runs off.) Ah! you start, do you? I was about to drive you pretty fast, I tell you—you and your wheels and your chariot!

(He enters his house.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Whither does the passion of evil lead! here is a perverse old man, who wants to cheat his creditors; but some mishap, which will speedily punish this rogue for his shameful schemings, cannot fail to overtake him from to-day. For a long time he has been burning to have his son know how to fight against all justice and right and to gain even the most iniquitous causes against his adversaries every one. I think this wish is going to be fulfilled. But mayhap, mayhap, he will soon wish his son were dumb rather!

STREPSIADES (*rushing out with PHIDIPIDES after him*)

Oh! oh! neighbours, kinsmen, fellow-citizens, help! help! to the rescue, I am being beaten! Oh! my head! oh! my jaw! Scoundrel! Do you beat your own father?

PHIDIPIDES (*calmly*)

Yes, father, I do.

## STREPSIADES

See! he admits he is beating me.

## PHIDIPIDES

Of course I do.

## STREPSIADES

You villain, you parricide, you gallows-bird!

## PHIDIPIDES

Go on, repeat your epithets, call me a thousand other names, if it please you. The more you curse, the greater my amusement!

## STREPSIADES

Oh! you ditch-arsed cynic!

## PHIDIPIDES

How fragrant the perfume breathed forth in your words.

## STREPSIADES

Do you beat your own father?

## PHIDIPIDES

Yes, by Zeus! and I am going to show you that I do right in beating you.

## STREPSIADES

Oh, wretch! can it be right to beat a father?

PHIDIPPIDES

I will prove it to you, and you shall own yourself vanquished.

STREPSIADES

Own myself vanquished on a point like this?

PHIDIPPIDES

It's the easiest thing in the world. Choose whichever of the two reasonings you like.

STREPSIADES

Of which reasonings?

PHIDIPPIDES

The Stronger and the Weaker.

STREPSIADES

Miserable fellow! Why, I am the one who had you taught how to refute what is right. and now you would persuade me it is right a son should beat his father.

PHIDIPPIDES

I think I shall convince you so thoroughly that, when you have heard me, you will not have a word to say.

STREPSIADES

Well, I am curious to hear what you have to say.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Consider well, old man, how you can best triumph over him. His brazenness shows me that he thinks himself sure of his case; he has some argument which gives him nerve. Note the confidence in his look!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But how did the fight begin? tell the Chorus; you cannot help doing that much.

STREPSIADES

I will tell you what was the start of the quarrel. At the end of the meal, as you know, I bade him take his lyre and sing me the air of Simonides, which tells of the fleece of the ram. He replied bluntly, that it was stupid, while drinking, to play the lyre and sing, like a woman when she is grinding barley.

PHIDIPPIDES

Why, by rights I ought to have beaten and kicked you the very moment you told me to sing!

## STREPSIADES

That is just how he spoke to me in the house, furthermore he added, that Simonides was a detestable poet. However, I mastered myself and for a while said nothing. Then I said to him, 'At least, take a myrtle branch and recite a passage from Aeschylus to me.'—'For my own part,' he at once replied, 'I look upon Aeschylus as the first of poets, for his verses roll superbly; they're nothing but incoherence, bombast and turgidity.' Yet still I smothered my wrath and said, 'Then recite one of the famous pieces from the modern poets.' Then he commenced a piece in which Euripides shows, oh! horror! a brother, who violates his own uterine sister.<sup>16</sup> Then I could not longer restrain myself, and attacked him with the most injurious abuse; naturally he retorted; hard words were hurled on both sides, and finally he sprang at me, broke my bones, bore me to earth, strangled and started killing me!

## PHIDIPIDES

I was right. What! not praise Euripides, the greatest of our poets?

## STREPSIADES

*He* the greatest of our poets? Ah! if I but dared to speak! but the blows would rain upon me harder than ever.

## PHIDIPIDES

Undoubtedly and rightly too.

## STREPSIADES

Rightly! oh! what impudence! to me, who brought you up! when you could hardly lisp, I guessed what you wanted. If you said *broo, broo*, well, I brought you your milk; if you asked for *mam mam*, I gave you bread; and you had no sooner said, *caca*, than I took you outside and held you out. And just now, when you were strangling me, I shouted, I bellowed that I was about to crap; and you, you scoundrel, had not the heart to take me outside, so that, though almost choking, I was compelled to do my crapping right there.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Young men, your hearts must be panting with impatience. What is Phidippides going to say? If, after such conduct, he proves he has done well, I would not give an obolus for the hide of old men.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, you, who know how to brandish and hurl the keen shafts of the new science, find a way to convince us, give your language an appearance of truth.



## PHIDIPPIDES

How pleasant it is to know these clever new inventions and to be able to defy the established laws! When I thought only about horses, I was not able to string three words together without a mistake, but now that the master has altered and improved me and that I live in this world of subtle thought, of reasoning and of meditation, I count on being able to prove satisfactorily that I have done well to thrash my father.

## STREPSIADES

Mount your horse! By Zeus! I would rather defray the keep of a four-in-hand team than be battered with blows.

## PHIDIPPIDES

I revert to what I was saying when you interrupted me. And first, answer me, did you beat me in my childhood?

## STREPSIADES

Why, assuredly, for your good and in your own best interest.

## PHIDIPPIDES

Tell me, is it not right, that in turn I should beat you for your good, since it is for a man's own best interest to be beaten? What! must your body be free of blows, and not mine? am I not free-born too? the children are to weep and the fathers go free? You will tell me, that according to the law, it is the lot of children to be beaten. But I reply that the old men are children twice over and that it is far more fitting to chastise them than the young, for there is less excuse for their faults.

## STREPSIADES

But the law nowhere admits that fathers should be treated thus.

## PHIDIPPIDES

Was not the legislator who carried this law a man like you and me? In those days he got men to believe him; then why should not I too have the right to establish for the future a new law, allowing children to beat their fathers in turn? We make you a present of all the blows which were received before his law, and admit that you thrashed us with impunity. But look how the cocks and other animals fight with their fathers; and yet what difference is there betwixt them and ourselves, unless it be that they do not propose decrees?

## STREPSIADES

But if you imitate the cocks in all things, why don't you scratch up the dunghill, why don't you sleep on a perch?

PHIDIPPIDES

That has no bearing on the case, good sir; Socrates would find no connection, I assure you.

STREPSIADES

Then do not beat at all, for otherwise you have only yourself to blame afterwards.

PHIDIPPIDES

What for?

STREPSIADES

I have the right to chastise you, and you to chastise your son, if you have one.

PHIDIPPIDES

And if I have not, I shall have cried in vain, and you will die laughing in my face.

STREPSIADES

What say you, all here present? It seems to me that he is right, and I am of opinion that they should be accorded their right. If we think wrongly, it is but just we should be beaten.

PHIDIPPIDES

Again, consider this other point.

STREPSIADES

It will be the death of me.

PHIDIPPIDES

But you will certainly feel no more anger because of the blows I have given you.

STREPSIADES

Come, show me what profit I shall gain from it.

PHIDIPPIDES

I shall beat my mother just as I have you.

STREPSIADES

What do you say? what's that you say? Hah! this is far worse still.

PHIDIPPIDES

And what if I prove to you by our school reasoning, that one ought to beat one's mother?

## STREPSIADES

Ah! if you do that, then you will only have to throw yourself, along with Socrates and his reasoning, into the Barathrum. Oh! Clouds! all our troubles emanate from you, from you, to whom I entrusted myself, body and soul.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No, you alone are the cause, because you have pursued the path of evil.

## STREPSIADES

Why did you not say so then, instead of egging on a poor ignorant old man?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We always act thus, when we see a man conceive a passion for what is evil; we strike him with some terrible disgrace, so that he may learn to fear the gods.

## STREPSIADES

Alas! oh Clouds! that's hard indeed, but it's just! I ought not to have cheated my creditors. . . . But come, my dear son, come with me to take vengeance on this wretched Chaerephon and on Socrates, who have deceived us both.

## PHIDIPPIDES

I shall do nothing against our masters.

## STREPSIADES

Oh! show some reverence for ancestral Zeus!

## PHIDIPPIDES

Mark him and his ancestral Zeus! What a fool you are! Does any such being as Zeus exist?

## STREPSIADES

Why, assuredly.

## PHIDIPPIDES

No, a thousand times no! The ruler of the world is the Whirlwind, that has unseated Zeus.

## STREPSIADES

He has not dethroned him. I believed it, because of this whirligig here. Unhappy wretch that I am! I have taken a piece of clay to be a god.

## PHIDIPPIDES

Very well! Keep your stupid nonsense for your own consumption.

(*He goes back into STREPSIADES' house.*)

## STREPSIADES

Oh! what madness! I had lost my reason when I threw over the gods through Socrates' seductive phrases. (*Addressing the statue of Hermes*) Oh! good Hermes, do not destroy me in your wrath. Forgive me; their babbling had driven me crazy. Be my counselor. Shall I pursue them at law or shall I . . . ? Order and I obey.—You are right, no law-suit; but up! let us burn down the home of those praters. Here, Xanthias, here! take a ladder, come forth and arm yourself with an axe; now mount upon the Thoughtery, demolish the roof, if you love your master, and may the house fall in upon them. Ho! bring me a blazing torch! There is more than one of them, arch-impostors as they are, on whom I am determined to have vengeance.

A DISCIPLE (*from within*)

Oh! oh!

## STREPSIADES

Come, torch, do your duty! Burst into full flame!

## DISCIPLE

What are you up to?

## STREPSIADES

What am I up to? Why, I am entering upon a subtle argument with the beams of the house.

SECOND DISCIPLE (*from within*)

Hullo! hullo! who is burning down our house?

## STREPSIADES

The man whose cloak you have appropriated.

## SECOND DISCIPLE

You are killing us!

## STREPSIADES

That is just exactly what I hope, unless my axe plays me false, or I fall and break my neck.

SOCRATES (*appearing at the window*)

Iii! you fellow on the roof, what are you doing up there?

STREPSIADES (*mocking* SOCRATES' *manner*)

I am traversing the air and contemplating the sun.

SOCRATES

Ah! ah! woe is upon me! I am suffocating!

SECOND DISCIPLE

And I, alas, shall be burnt up!

STREPSIADES

Ah! you insulted the gods! You studied the face of the moon! Chase them, strike and beat them down! Forward! they have richly deserved their fate—above all, by reason of their blasphemies.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

So let the Chorus file off the stage. Its part is played.

## NOTES FOR THE CLOUDS

1. City slaves were normally punished by being forced to leave the delights of urban life and to undergo the unwanted rigours of agricultural labour. The Peloponnesian War, with its almost annual invasions of Attica, rendered it impossible to till the fields of the country-side and thus difficult to punish the slaves of Athens.

2. The ending *-ippus* (Greek *hippos*, "horse") had honorific connotations suggesting wealth and status. The combining form *Phid-*, on the other hand (Greek *phido*, "thrift") suggested precisely the opposite.

3. Aristophanes here coins the word *dientercuma*, meaning a "looking through intestines." A French translator renders, "*intestigation*."

4. A regular part of the ritual of sacrifice was the sprinkling of the head of the victim with flour.

5. These are characters from the lost *Banqueters*, which Aristophanes exhibited in 427, his first production.

6. Socrates here is speaking, of course, of poetical measures, whereas Strepsiades consistently misunderstands and takes them for measures of capacity. It is the same as if someone were to ask, "Do you like the hexameter?" and to receive the answer, "I prefer the kilometer."

7. The primary meaning of the Greek word *daktylos* was "finger."

8. The vocative case of Greek masculines in *-as* has the apparently feminine ending *-a*.

9. A pun on *koris*, the Greek word for "bug."

10. The sons of Earth were the Titans, who had fought against the gods. Hence the epithet here implies atheism or irreligion on the part of Socrates and his disciples.

11. The terminology of the sophists designated the Just Discourse as the stronger, the Unjust as the weaker, reasoning.

12. This was the punishment supposed to be meted out to adulterers.

13. The Greek word is *curyproktos*; its precise signification in ordinary usage is difficult to determine, and it has seemed better to give its etymologically literal translation in the text and then to explain in this note that it was probably only a general term of abuse.

14. By Athenian law, if anyone summoned another to appear in court,

he was obliged to deposit a sum sufficient to cover the costs of procedure.

15. A person who fell off an ass was one who got himself into trouble through no one's fault but his own, hence a stupid person. The expression also contains a pun, *ap' onou pscin*, "to fall off an ass" being very like *apo nou pscin*, "to lose one's wits."

16. Marriage with a half-sister was incestuous in the eyes of the Athenians only when the common parent was the mother.

IV  
THE WASPS



## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

PHILOCLEON

BDELYCLEON, *his Son*

SOSIAS, *Slave of Philocleon*

XANTHIAS, *Slave of Philocleon*

BOYS

DOGS

A GUEST

A BAKER'S WIFE

AN ACCUSER

CHORUS OF WASPS

## INTRODUCTION

A LITTLE less than a year after the signal and merited failure of *The Clouds*, Aristophanes won the third victory of his career with *The Wasps*, which he produced at the Lenaeon festival of 422 under the pseudonym of Philonides. The play is thoroughly political in its theme and genuinely comic in its treatment, and its construction testifies to a care and exhibits a skill that have not hitherto been observable in the poet's productions. It is evident that the disappointment of 423, so far from discouraging him, has challenged Aristophanes to greater achievement and taught him a number of fruitful lessons. What he has still to acquire is a sure and reliable sense of proportion, and the only significant defect of *The Wasps* lies in the fact that the first part is longer than the essential humour of its theme can justify, while the latter section is not developed to the full extent of its potentialities.

The play is customarily designated as a satire on an excessive passion for litigation and juridical proceedings which is supposed to have characterized the Athenian populace, but this pronouncement, apposite enough to *Les Plaideurs* of Racine, is both wide of the mark and far too general if applied to the *The Wasps* of Aristophanes. Nowhere in this comedy does the poet suggest that the Athenian judicial institutions themselves are anything but admirable, nor does he ever give us to understand that the litigious mania which he so amusingly lampoons was in any sense epidemic with his countrymen. A keener analysis and a sounder judgment disclose that the true targets of the poet's attack are the *abuses* of the Athenian judicial system, for which he obviously holds the demagogues solely or primarily culpable. Thus *The Wasps* is a sort of appendix to *The Knights*, a less direct and more specialized continuation of the fight against Cleon, begun as early as 426 with the lost *Babylonians*.

The first part of the play, as far as the parabasis, is taken up with the efforts of the antidemagogical Bdelycleon to prevent his father Philocleon, the tanner's friend, from indulging his insatiable craving for jury service. The old man has hitherto been completely successful in nullifying these attempts, and Bdelycleon in desperation has shut him up in the house and stretched a huge net around it. Two sleepy slaves strive man-

fully to keep watch on the front of the house, while Bdelycleon himself mounts guard on the roof.

The comedy opens with this tableau of varied vigilance, and as soon as the situation has been explained to the audience the action is initiated in a series of frantic and fantastic efforts on the part of Philocleon to escape his odious confinement and to get to court in time for the trials. First he is heard in the stove-chamber, "ferreting about like a rat in his hole," and a moment later he affects to be the snake coming out of the chimney. Balked in this, he requests his son to let him go out to sell his ass, and when Bdelycleon, intending to deprive him of this excuse, fetches the ass himself, his father is discovered clinging to its belly like another Odysseus escaping from the Cyclops' cave. His son quickly shuts him up in the house again, but just as the slaves are piling stones against the door, a falling brick warns them that Philocleon has crept beneath the tiles of the roof and is about to fly away like a sparrow. As soon as this attempt has been foiled, the old man's fellow jurymen, costumed as wasps, arrive to take him to court. The sight of his worthy companions and contemporaries gives new zeal to his heart and fresh strength to his jaws, and even though he is toothless he gnaws a hole in the net and is letting himself down from his window, when his son awakes from a brief sleep and strives energetically to prevent his escape.

The Wasps come gallantly to the air of their fellow creature and a lively combat ensues between the jurymen on the one hand and Bdelycleon and his slaves on the other. Eventually blows give place to words and a lengthy debate is held between the father and the son on the merits and the defects of the former's beloved profession. Bdelycleon finally convinces his father that he is really nothing but the tool of the demagogues and promises to let him amuse himself by holding trials in his own home if he will only refrain from judging in public. The old man agrees to this, and when all the paraphernalia of a typical court have been travestied and collected, the first plaintiff appears before the new domestic tribunal. The subsequent trial of the dog Labes for the theft of a Sicilian cheese is one of Aristophanes' most felicitous inspirations, particularly in its conclusion, when Philocleon is misled into voting for acquittal. This is the first time in his life that he has ever been so foolish, and he swoons quite away when he learns of the dreadful error that he has committed. Bdelycleon revives him and takes him into the house, attempting to console him with promises of the gay life that he is henceforth to lead.

The stage is now clear and the Chorus is at long last given an opportunity to deliver the parabasis. The anapæsts reproach the audience for their reception of *The Clouds* a year earlier and recite the services which the poet claims to have rendered his native city. The tender and nostalgic ode, together with the epirrheme and the antode, celebrates the glorious deeds

of the old jurymen in their youth, at Marathon and under Cimon, and the antepirrheme explains why they are costumed as wasps. None of the comedies that have come down to us contains a parabasis so well integrated or so effective as this one.

At the conclusion of the parabasis Bdelycleon and his father emerge from the house on the way to a banquet; the new life of the old man is already beginning. Before he can embark on this, however, he must be taught how to act, the jurymen must be made into a gentleman. The scene in which this takes place is one of Aristophanes' best, and the only adverse criticism that can be levelled against it is that it is not long enough; its quality is such that one is dissatisfied with its quantity. In all too short a time, we feel, the son becomes either satisfied with his father's behaviour or resigned to the impossibility of its improvement, and the pair depart for the dinner-party.

After a brief ode by the Chorus, Xanthias, the slave, returns with lurid reports of Philocleon's misbehaviour; he has drunk far too much, made a fool of himself, insulted all the guests, absconded with the flute-girl, and on the way home been guilty of assault and robbery. Immediately the miscreant enters in person, and a highly amusing scene follows in which he practises his newly acquired social and conversational graces on those whom he has recently maltreated. Finally his son contrives to get him into the house, but he can not keep him there, and soon the old man reappears, now dominated by Terpsichorean urges, and the comedy ends with a wild dance in which Philocleon matches his talents against those of the three little sons of Carcinus the tragedian.

Such is the hilarious and satisfying conclusion of the finest comedy that Aristophanes has so far produced. There have not been many who have justly appreciated its excellence, for it is of all the plays the hardest to learn to love. Its subject is alien to our sympathies and distant from our understanding, and only the candid light of intimate acquaintance can reveal the treasury of true wit and high art which it contains. *The Acharnians* was an excellent comedy in its own right, but it clearly promised even better ones to come. The fulfilment of these promises was prologued or obstructed by the excessive courage of *The Knights* and the false direction of *The Clouds*. In *The Wasps* Aristophanes has ceased to disappoint us and has written a comedy which not only makes good most of the promises of *The Acharnians* but is itself filled with clearer and brighter auguries. The poet will not disappoint us again; from the work of the next ten years of his life there have been preserved four plays which represent for us the highest achievement of his art, and in them we shall see all the early promises fulfilled, not only those of *The Acharnians*, but the more difficult ones of *The Wasps* as well.

## THE WASPS

(SCENE:—*In the background is the house of PHILOCLEON, surrounded by a huge net. Two slaves are on guard, one of them asleep. On the roof is BDELYCLEON.*)

SOSIAS (*waking XANTHIAS up*)

WHY, Xanthias! what are you doing, wretched man?

XANTHIAS

I am teaching myself how to rest; I have been awake and on watch the whole night.

SOSIAS

So you want to earn trouble for your ribs, eh? Don't you know what sort of animal we are guarding here?

XANTHIAS

Aye indeed! but I want to put my cares to sleep for a while.  
(*He falls asleep again.*)

SOSIAS

Beware what you do. I too feel soft sleep spreading over my eyes.

XANTHIAS

Are you crazy, like a Corybant?

SOSIAS

No! It's Bacchus who lulls me off.

XANTHIAS

Then you serve the same god as myself. Just now a heavy slumber settled on my eyelids like a hostile Mede; I nodded and, faith! I had a wondrous dream.

SOSIAS

Indeed! and so had I. A dream such as I never had before. But first tell me yours.

## XANTHIAS

I saw an eagle, a gigantic bird, descend upon the market-place; it seized a brazen buckler with its talons and bore it away into the highest heavens, then I saw it was Cleonymus had thrown it away.

## SOSIAS

This Cleonymus is a riddle worth propounding among guests. How can one and the same animal have cast away his buckler both on land, in the sky and at sea?

## XANTHIAS

Alas! what ill does such a dream portend for me?

## SOSIAS

Rest undisturbed! Please the gods, no evil will befall you.

## XANTHIAS

Nevertheless, it's a fatal omen when a man throws away his weapons. But what was your dream? Let me hear.

## SOSIAS

Oh! it is a dream of high import. It has reference to the hull of the State; to nothing less.

## XANTHIAS

Tell it to me quickly, show me its very keel.

## SOSIAS

In my first slumber I thought I saw sheep, wearing cloaks and carrying staves, met in assembly on the Pnyx; a rapacious whale was haranguing them and screaming like a pig that is being grilled.

## XANTHIAS

Faugh! faugh!

## SOSIAS

What's the matter?

## XANTHIAS

Enough, enough, spare me. Your dream stinks vilely of old leather.<sup>1</sup>

## SOSIAS

Then this scoundrelly whale seized a balance and set to weighing ox-fat.<sup>2</sup>

## XANTHIAS

Alas! it's our poor Athenian people, whom this accursed beast wishes to cut up and despoil of their fat.

SOSIAS

Seated on the ground close to it, I saw Theorus, who had the head of a crow. Then Alcibiades said to me in his lisping way, "Do you thee? Theoruth hath a crow'th head."

XANTHIAS

Ah! that's very well lisped indeed!

SOSIAS

Isn't this mighty strange? Theorus turning into a crow!

XANTHIAS

No, it is glorious.

SOSIAS

Why?

XANTHIAS

Why? He was a man and now he has suddenly become a crow; does it not foretoken that he will take his flight from here and go to the crows? "

SOSIAS

Interpreting dreams so aptly certainly is worth two obols.

XANTHIAS (*turning to the audience*)

Come, I must explain the matter to the spectators. But first a few words of preamble: expect nothing very high-flown from us, nor any jests stolen from Megara; we have no slaves, who throw baskets of nuts <sup>4</sup> to the spectators, nor any Heracles to be robbed of his dinner, nor does Euripides get loaded with contumely; and despite the happy chance that gave Cleon his fame we shall not go out of our way to belabour him again. Our little subject is not wanting in sense; it is well within your capacity <sup>5</sup> and at the same time cleverer than many vulgar comedies.—We have a master of great renown, who is now sleeping up there on the other story. He has bidden us keep guard over his father, whom he has locked in, so that he may not go out. This father has a curious complaint; not one of you could hit upon or guess it, if I did not tell you.—Well then, try! I hear Amynias, the son of Pronapus, over there, saying, "He is addicted to gambling." He's wrong! He is imputing his own malady to others. Yet love is indeed the principal part of his disease. Ah! here Sosias is telling Dercylus, "He loves drinking." Wrong again! the love of wine is a good man's failing. "Well then," says Nicostratus of the Scambonian deme, "he either loves sacrifices or else strangers." God no! he is not fond of strangers, Nicostratus, for he who says "Philoxenus" means a pederast. It's mere waste of time, you will not find it out. If you want to know it,

keep silence! I will tell your our master's complaint; of all men, it is he who is fondest of the Heliæa. Thus, to be judging is his hobby, and he groans if he is not sitting on the first seat. He does not close an eye at night, and if he dozes off for an instant his mind flies instantly to the clepsydra. He is so accustomed to hold the balloting pebble, that he awakes with his three fingers pinched together as if he were offering incense to the new moon. If he sees scribbled on some doorway, "How charming is Demos, the son of Pyrilampes!" he will write beneath it, "How charming is Cemos!" His cock crowed one evening; said he, "He has had money from the accused to awaken me too late. As soon as he rises from supper he bawls for his shoes and away he rushes down there before dawn to sleep beforehand, glued fast to the column like an oyster. He is a merciless judge, never failing to draw the convicting line<sup>6</sup> and return home with his nails full of wax like a bumble-bee. Fearing he might run short of pebbles he keeps enough at home to cover a sea-beach, so that he may have the means of recording his sentence. Such is his madness, and all advice is useless; he only judges the more each day. So we keep him under lock and key, to prevent his going out; for his son is broken-hearted over this mania. At first he tried him with gentleness, wanted to persuade him to wear the cloak no longer, to go out no more; unable to convince him, he had him bathed and purified according to the ritual without any greater success, and then handed him over to the Corybantes; but the old man escaped them, and carrying off the kettledrum, rushed right into the midst of the Heliasts. As Cybelé could do nothing with her rites, his son took him to Aegina and forcibly made him lie one night in the temple of Asclepius, the God of Healing, but before daylight there he was to be seen at the gate of the tribunal. Since then we let him go out no more, but he escaped us by the drains or by the skylight, so we stuffed up every opening with old rags and made all secure; then he drove short sticks into the wall and sprang from rung to rung like a magpie. Now we have stretched nets all around the court and we keep watch and ward. The old man's name is Philocleon, it's the best name he could have, and the son is called Bdelycleon, for he is a man very fit to cure an insolent fellow of his boasting.

BDELYCLEON (*from the roof*)

Xanthias! Sosias! Are you asleep?

XANTHIAS

Alas!

SOSIAS

What is the matter?



XANTHIAS

Why, Bdelycleon is getting up.

BDELYCLEON

Will neither of you come here? My father has got into the stove-chamber and is ferreting about like a rat in his hole. Take care he does not escape through the bath drain. You there, put all your weight against the door.

XANTHIAS

Yes, master.

BDELYCLEON

By Zeus! what is that noise in the chimney? Hullo! who are you?

PHILOCLEON (*poking his head out of the chimney*)

I am the smoke going up.

BDELYCLEON

Smoke? smoke of what wood?

PHILOCLEON

Of fig-wood.<sup>7</sup>

BDELYCLEON

Ah! that's the most acrid of all. But you shall not get out. Where is the chimney cover? Come down again. Now, up with another cross-bar. Now look out for some fresh dodge. But am I not the most unfortunate of men? Henceforward I shall only be called the son of Capnious.

XANTHIAS

He is pushing the door.

BDELYCLEON

Throw your weight upon it, come, put heart into the work. I will come and help you. Watch both lock and bolt. Take care he does not gnaw through the peg.

PHILOCLEON (*from within*)

What are you doing, you wretches? Let me go out; it is imperative that I go and judge, or Dracontides will be acquitted.

XANTHIAS

Would you mind that?

PHILOCLEON

Once at Delphi, the god, whom I was consulting, foretold, that if an accused man escaped me, I should die of consumption.

XANTHIAS

Apollo the Saviour, what a prophecy!

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I beseech you, if you do not want my death, let me go.

XANTHIAS

No, Philocleon, no never, by Posidon!

PHILOCLEON

Well then, I shall gnaw through the net with my teeth.

XANTHIAS

But you have no teeth.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! you rascal, how can I kill you? How? Give me a sword, quick, or a conviction tablet.

BDELYCLEON

Our friend is planning some great crime.

PHILOCLEON

No, by Zeus! but I want to go and sell my ass and its panniers, for it's the first of the month.

BDELYCLEON

Could I not sell it just as well?

PHILOCLEON

Not as well as I could.

BDELYCLEON

No, but better.

PHILOCLEON

Bring out the ass anyway.

XANTHIAS

What a clever excuse he has found now! What cunning to get you to let him go out!

BDELYCLEON

Yes, but I have not swallowed the hook; I scented the trick. I will go in and fetch the ass, so that the old man may not point his weapons that way again. (*He goes in, returning immediately with the ass.*) Stupid old ass, are you weeping because you are going to be sold? Come, go a bit quicker. Why, what are you moaning and groaning for? You might be carrying another Odysseus.

XANTHIAS

Why, certainly, so he is! someone has crept beneath his belly.

BDELYCLEON

Who, who? Let's see. Why it's he! What does this mean? Who are you? Come, speak!

PHILOCLEON

I am Noman.

BDELYCLEON

Noman? Of what country?

PHILOCLEON

Of Ithaca, son of Apodrasippides.

BDELYCLEON

Ha! Mister Noman, you will not laugh presently. Pull him out quick. Ah! the wretch, where has he crept to? Does he not resemble a she-ass to the life?

PHILOCLEON

If you do not leave me in peace, I shall sue.

BDELYCLEON

And what will the suit be about?

PHILOCLEON

The shade of an ass.<sup>8</sup>

BDELYCLEON

You are a poor man of very little wit, but thoroughly brazen.

PHILOCLEON

A poor man! Ah! by Zeus! you know not now what I am worth; but you will know when you disembowel the old Heliast's money-bag.

BDELYCLEON

Come, get back indoors, both you and your ass.

PHILOCLEON

On! my brethren of the tribunal! oh! Cleon! to the rescue!

BDELYCLEON

Go and bawl in there under lock and key. And you there, pile plenty of stones against the door, thrust the bolt home into the staple, and to keep this beam in its place roll that great mortar against it. Quick's the word.

XANTHIAS

Oh! my god! whence did this brick fall on me?

BDELYCLEON

Perhaps a rat loosened it.

XANTHIAS

A rat? it's surely our gutter-judge, who has crept beneath the tiles of the roof.

BDELYCLEON

Ah! woe to us! there he is, he has turned into a sparrow; he will be flying off. Where is the net? where? Shoo! shoo! get back! Ah! by Zeus! I would rather have to guard Scioné than such a father.

XANTHIAS

And now that we have driven him in thoroughly and he can no longer escape without our knowledge, can we not have a few winks of sleep, no matter how few?

BDELYCLEON

Why, wretch! the other jurymen will be here almost directly to summon my father!

XANTHIAS

Why, it's scarcely dawn yet!

BDELYCLEON

Ah, they must have risen late to-day. Generally it is the middle of the night when they come to fetch him. They arrive here, carrying lanterns in their hands and singing the charming old verses of Phrynichus' *Sidonian Women*; it's their way of calling him.

XANTHIAS

Well, if need be, we will chase them off with stones.

BDELYCLEON

What! you dare to speak so? Why, this class of old men, if irritated, becomes as terrible as a swarm of wasps. They carry below their loins the

sharpest of stings, with which to prick their foe; they shout and leap and their stings burn like so many sparks.

## XANTHIAS

Have no fear! If I can find stones to throw into this nest of jurymen-wasps, I shall soon have them cleared off.

(*Enter the CHORUS, composed of old men costumed as wasps.*)

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

March on, advance boldly and bravely! Comias, your feet are dragging; once you were as tough as a dog-skin strap and now even Charinades walks better than you. Ha! Strymodorus of Conthylé, you best of mates, where is Euergides and where is Chabes of Phlya? Ha, ha, bravo! there you are, the last of the lads with whom we mounted guard together at Byzantium. Do you remember how, one night, prowling round, we noiselessly stole the kneading-trough of a baker's wife; we split it in two and cooked our green-stuff with it.—But let us hasten, for the case of Laches comes on to-day, and they all say he has embezzled a pot of money. Hence Cleon, our protector, advised us yesterday to come early and with a three days' stock of fiery rage so as to chastise him for his crimes. Let us hurry, comrades, before it is light; come, let us search every nook with our lanterns to see whether those who wish us ill have not set us some trap.

## BOY

Father, father, watch out for the mud.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Pick up a blade of straw and trim your lamp.

## BOY

No, I can trim it quite well with my finger.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why do you pull out the wick, you little dolt? Oil is scarce, and it's not you who suffer when it has to be paid for. (*Strikes him.*)

## BOY

If you teach us again with your fists, we shall put out the lamps and go home; then you will have no light and will squatter about in the mud like ducks in the dark.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I know how to punish offenders bigger than you. But I think I am treading in some mud. Oh! it's certain it will rain in torrents for four days at least; look at the snuff in our lamps; that is always a sign of heavy rain; but the rain and the north wind will be good for the crops that are still

standing. Why, what can have happened to our mate, who lives here? Why does he not come to join our party? There used to be no need to haul him in our wake, for he would march at our head singing the verses of Phrynichus; he was a lover of singing. Should we not, friends, make a halt here and sing to call him out? The charm of my voice will fetch him out, if he hears it.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Why does the old man not show himself before the door? Why does he not answer? Has he lost his shoes? has he stubbed his toe in the dark and thus got a swollen ankle? Perhaps he has a tumour in his groin. He was the hardest of us all; he alone *never* allowed himself to be moved. If anyone tried to move him, he would lower his head, saying, "You might just as well try to boil a stone." But I be-think me, an accused man escaped us yesterday through his false pretence that he loved Athens and had been the first to unfold the Samian plot. Perhaps his acquittal has so distressed Philocleon that he is abed with fever—he is quite capable of such a thing.—Friend, arise, do not thus vex your heart, but forget your wrath. To-day we have to judge a man made wealthy by treason, one of those who set Thrace free; we have to prepare him a funeral urn . . . so march on, my boy, get going.

(*Here a duct begins between the BOY and the CHORUS.*)

BOY

Father, would you give me something if I asked for it?

CHORUS

Assuredly, my child, but tell me what nice thing do you want me to buy you? A set of knuckle-bones, I suppose.

BOY

No, father, I prefer figs; they are better.

CHORUS

No, by Zeus! even if you were to hang yourself with vexation.

BOY

Well then, I will lead you no farther.

CHORUS

With my small pay, I am obliged to buy bread, wood, and stew; and now you ask me for figs!

BOY

But, father, if the Archon should not form a court to-day, how are we to buy our dinner? Have you some good hope to offer us or only "Hellé's sacred waves"?

CHORUS

Alas! alas! I have not a notion how we shall dine.

BOY

Oh! my poor mother! why did you let me see this day?

CHORUS

So that you might give me troubles to feed on.

BOY

Little wallet, you seem like to be a mere useless ornament!

BOY AND CHORUS

It is our destiny to groan.

PHILOCLEON (*appearing at an upper window; singing*)

My friends, I have long been pining away while listening to you from my window, but I absolutely know not what to do. I am detained here, because I have long wanted to go with you to the law-court and do all the harm I can. Oh! Zeus! cause the peals of thy thunder to roll, change me quickly into smoke or make me into a Proxenides, a tissue of falsehoods, like the son of Sellus. Oh, King of Heaven! hesitate not to grant me this favour, pity my misfortune or else may thy dazzling lightning instantly reduce me to ashes; then carry me hence, and may thy breath hurl me into some strong, hot marinade or turn me into one of the stones on which the votes are counted.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Who is it detains you and shuts you in? Speak, for you are talking to friends.

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

My son. But no bawling, he is there in front asleep; lower your voice.

CHORUS (*singing*)

But, poor fellow, what is his aim? what is his object?

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

My friends, he will not have me judge nor do anyone any ill, but he wants me to stay at home and enjoy myself, and I will not.

CHORUS (*singing*)

And does this wretch, this Demologocleon dare to say such odious things, just because you tell the truth about our navy? He would not have dared, had he not been a conspirator.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But meanwhile, you must devise some new dodge, so that you can come down here without his knowledge.

## PHILOCLEON

But what? Try to find some way. For myself, I am ready for anything, so much do I burn to run along the tiers of the tribunal with my voting-pebble in my hand.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There is surely some hole through which you could manage to squeeze from within, and escape dressed in rags, like the crafty Odysseus.

## PHILOCLEON

Everything is sealed fast; not so much as a gnat could get through. Think of some other plan; there is no possible hole of escape.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Do you recall how, when you were with the army at the taking of Naxos, you descended so readily from the top of the wall by means of the spits you had stolen?

## PHILOCLEON

I remember that well enough, but what connection is there with present circumstances? I was young, clever at thieving, I had all my strength, none watched over me, and I could run off without fear. But to-day men-at-arms are placed at every outlet to watch me, and two of them are lying in wait for me at this very door armed with spits, just as folks lie in wait for a cat that has stolen a piece of meat.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Come, discover some way as quick as possible. Here is the dawn come, my dear little friend.

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

The best way is to gnaw through the net. Oh! goddess who watchest over the nets,<sup>9</sup> forgive me for making a hole in this one.

CHORUS (*singing*)

It's acting like a man eager for his safety. Get your jaws to work.



PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

There! it's gnawed through! But no shouting! let Bdelycleon notice nothing!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Have no fear, have no fear! if he breathes a syllable, it will be to bruise his own knuckles; he will have to fight to defend his own head. We shall teach him not to insult the mysteries of the goddesses.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But fasten a rope to the window, tie it around your body and let yourself down to the ground, with your heart bursting with the fury of Diopithes.

PHILOCLEON

But if these notice it and want to fish me up and drag me back into the house, what will you do? Tell me that.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We shall call up the full strength of our oak-tough courage to your aid. That is what we will do.

PHILOCLEON

I trust myself to you and risk the danger. If misfortune overtakes me, take away my body, bathe it with your tears and bury it beneath the bar of the tribunal.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nothing will happen to you, rest assured. Come, friend, have courage and let yourself slide down while you invoke your country's gods.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! mighty Lycus! noble hero and my neighbour, thou, like myself, takest pleasure in the tears and the groans of the accused. If thou art come to live near the tribunal, 'tis with the express design of hearing them incessantly; thou alone of all the heroes hast wished to remain among those who weep. Have pity on me and save him, who lives close to thee; I swear I will never make water, never, nor ever let a fart, against the railing of thy statue.

(*He slides down as quietly as possible; nevertheless BDELYCLEON wakes up.*)

BDELYCLEON (*to XANTHIAS*)

Ho, there! ho! get up!

XANTHIAS (*waking up*)

What's the matter?

BDELYCLEON

I thought I heard talking close to me. Is the old man at it again, escaping through some loophole?

XANTHIAS

No, by Zeus! no, but he is letting himself down by a rope.

BDELYCLEON

Ha, rascal! what are you doing there? You shall not descend. (*To XANTHIAS*) Mount quick to the other window, strike him with the boughs that hang over the entrance; perhaps he will turn back when he feels himself being thrashed.

PHILOCLEON (*to the audience*)

To the rescue! all you, who are going to have lawsuits this year—Smicythion, Tisiades, Chremon and P'heredipnus. It's now or never, before they force me to return, that you must help.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why do we delay to let loose that fury, that is so terrible, when our nests are attacked?

CHORUS (*singing*)

I feel my angry sting is stiffening, that sharp sting, with which we punish our enemies. Come, children, cast your cloaks to the winds, run, shout, tell Cleon what is happening, that he may march against this foe of our city, who deserves death, since he proposes to prevent the trial of lawsuits.

(*The BOYS run off, taking the CHORUS' mantles with them.*)

BDELYCLEON (*rushing out of the house with the two slaves and seizing his father*)

Friends, listen to the truth, instead of bawling.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

By Zeus! we will shout to heaven.

BDELYCLEON

And I shall not let him go.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why, this is intolerable, 'tis manifest tyranny.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! citizens, oh! Theorus, the enemy of the gods! and all you flatterers, who rule us! come to our aid.

## XANTHIAS

By Heracles! they have stings. Do you see them, master?

## BDELYCLEON

It was with these weapons that they killed Philippus the son of Gorgias when he was put on trial.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And you too shall die. Turn yourselves this way, all, with your stings out for attack and throw yourselves upon him in good and serried order, and swelled up with wrath and rage. Let him learn to know the sort of foes he has dared to irritate.

## XANTHIAS

The fight will be fast and furious, by great Zeus! I tremble at the sight of their stings.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Let this man go, unless you want to envy the tortoise his hard shell.

## PHILOCLEON

Come, my dear companions, wasps with relentless hearts, fly against him, animated with your fury. Sting him in the arse, eyes, and fingers.

## BDELYCLEON

(*opening the door and trying to shove his struggling father in*)

Midass, Phryx, Masyntias, here! Come and help. Seize this man and hand him over to no one, otherwise you shall starve to death in chains. Fear nothing, I have often heard the crackling of fig-leaves in the fire.<sup>10</sup>

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you won't let him go, I shall bury this sting in your body.

## PHILOCLEON

Oh, Cecrops, mighty hero with the tail of a dragon! Seest thou how these barbarians ill-use me—me, who have many a time made them weep a full bushel of tears?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Is not old age filled with cruel ills? What violence these two slaves offer to their old master! they have forgotten all by-gones, the fur-coats and the jackets and the caps he bought for them; in winter he watched that their

feet should not get frozen. And only see them now; there is no gentleness in their look nor any recollection of the slippers of other days.

PHILOCLEON (*to XANTHIAS*)

Will you let me go, you accursed animal? Don't you remember the day when I surprised you stealing the grapes; I tied you to an olive-tree and I cut open your bottom with such vigorous lashes that folks thought you had been raped. Get away, you are ungrateful. But let go of me, and you too, before my son comes up.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You shall repay us for all this, and that soon. Tremble at our ferocious glance; you shall taste our just anger.

BDELYCLEON

Strike! strike! Xanthias! Drive these wasps away from the house.

XANTHIAS

That's just what I am doing.

BDELYCLEON

Blind them with smoke too!

XANTHIAS AND SOSIAS

You will not go? The plague seize you! Will you not clear off?

BDELYCLEON

Hit them with your stick Xanthias, and you Sosias, to smoke them out better, throw Aeschines, the son of Sellartius, on the fire.

XANTHIAS (*as the CHORUS retires from the unequal conquest*)

There, we were bound to drive you off sooner or later!

BDELYCLEON

Eh! by Zeus! you would not have put them to flight so easily if they had fed on the verses of Philocles.

CHORUS (*singing*)

It is clear to all the poor that tyranny has attacked us sorely. Proud emulator of Arynias, you, who only take pleasure in doing ill, see how you are preventing us from obeying the laws of the city; you do not even seek a pretext or any plausible excuse, but claim to rule alone.

BDELYCLEON

Hold! A truce to all blows and brawling! Had we not better confer together and come to some understanding?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Confer with you, the people's foe! with you, a royalist . . .

CHORUS (*singing*)

. . . and accomplice of Brasidas, you with your woollen-fringed coat and your long beard?

## BDELYCLEON

Ah! it would be better to separate altogether from my father than to steer my boat daily through such stormy seas!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! you have but reached the parsley and the rue, to use the common saying.<sup>11</sup> What you are suffering is nothing! but welcome the hour when the advocate shall adduce all these same arguments against you and shall summon your accomplices to give witness.

## BDELYCLEON

In the name of the gods! withdraw or we shall fight you the whole day long.

CHORUS (*singing*)

No, not as long as I retain an atom of breath. Ha! your desire is to tyrannize over us!

## BDELYCLEON

Everything is now tyranny with us, no matter what is concerned, whether it be large or small. Tyranny! I have not heard the word mentioned once in fifty years, and now it is more common than salt-fish, the word is even current on the market. If you are buying gurnards and don't want anchovies, the huckster next door, who is selling the latter, at once exclaims, "That is a man whose kitchen savours of tyranny!" If you ask for onions to season your fish, the green-stuff woman winks one eye and asks, "Ha, you ask for onions! are you seeking to tyrannize, or do you think that Athens must pay you your seasonings as a tribute?"

## XANTHIAS

Yesterday I went to see a whore about noon and told her to get on top; she flew into a rage, pretending I wanted to restore the tyranny of Hippias.<sup>12</sup>

## BDELYCLEON

That's the talk that pleases the people! As for myself, I want my father to lead a joyous life like Morychus instead of going away before dawn basely to calumniate and condemn; and for this I am accused of conspiracy and tyrannical practice!

PHILOCLEON

And quite right too, by Zeus! The most exquisite dishes do not make up to me for the life of which you deprive me. I scorn your red mullet and your eels, and would far rather eat a nice little lawsuitlet cooked in the pot.

BDELYCLEON

That's because you have got used to seeking your pleasure in it; but if you will agree to keep silence and hear me, I think I could persuade you that you deceive yourself altogether.

PHILOCLEON

*I deceive myself, when I am judging?*

BDELYCLEON

You do not see that you are the laughing-stock of these men, whom you are ready to worship. You are their slave and do not know it.

PHILOCLEON

*I a slave, I, who lord it over all?*

BDELYCLEON

Not at all, you think you are ruling when you are only obeying. Tell me, father, what do you get out of the tribute paid by so many Greek towns.

PHILOCLEON

Much, and I appoint my colleagues jurymen.

BDELYCLEON

And I also. (*To the slaves*) Release him.

PHILOCLEON

And bring me a sword; If I am worsted in this debate, I shall fall on the blade.

BDELYCLEON

Tell me whether you will accept the verdict of the Court.

PHILOCLEON

May I never drink my Heliast's pay in honour of the Good Genius, if I do not.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Now it is necessary for you, who are of our school, to say something novel, that you may not seem . . .

BDELYCLEON (*interrupting*)

And I must note down everything he says, so as to remember it; someone bring me a tablet, quick.

CHORUS (*singing*)

. . . to side with this youth in his opinions. You see how serious the question has become; if he should prevail, which the gods forbend, it will be all over for us.

## PHILOCLEON

But what will you say of it, if he *should* triumph in the debate?

CHORUS (*singing*)

That old men are no longer good for anything; we shall be perpetually laughed at in the streets, shall be called thallopophores, mere brief-bags.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You are to be the champion of all our rights and sovereignty. Come, take courage! Bring into action all the resources of your wit.

## PHILOCLEON

At the outset I will prove to you that there exists no king whose might is greater than ours. Is there a pleasure, a blessing comparable with that of a juryman? Is there a being who lives more in the midst of delights, who is more feared, aged though he be? From the moment I leave my bed, men of power, the most illustrious in the city, await me at the bar of the tribunal; the moment I am seen from the greatest distance, they come forward to offer me a gentle hand,—that has pilfered the public funds; they entreat me, bowing right low and with a piteous voice, “Oh, father,” they say, “pity me, I adjure you by the profit *you* were able to make in the public service or in the army, when dealing with the victuals.” Why, the man who speaks thus would not know of my existence, had I not let him off on some former occasion.

## BDELYCLEON

Let us note this first point, the supplicants.

## PHILOCLEON

These entreaties have appeased my wrath, and I enter—firmly resolved to do nothing that I have promised. Nevertheless I listen to the accused. Oh! what tricks to secure acquittal! Ah! there is no form of flattery that is not addressed to the Helias! Some groan over their poverty and exaggerate it. Others tell us anecdotes or some comic story from Aesop. Others, again, cut jokes; they fancy I shall be appeased if

I laugh. If we are not even then won over, why, then they drag forward their young children by the hand, both boys and girls, who prostrate themselves and whine with one accord, and then the father, trembling as if before a god, beseeches me not to condemn him out of pity for them, "If you love the voice of the lamb, have pity on my sons"; and because I am fond of little sows,<sup>13</sup> I must yield to his daughter's prayers. Then we relax the heat of our wrath a little for him. Is not this great power indeed, which allows even wealth to be disdained?

BDELYCLEON

A second point to note, the disdain of wealth. And now recall to me what are the advantages you enjoy, you, who pretend to rule over Greece?

PHILOCLEON

We are entrusted with the inspection of the young men, and thus we have a right to examine their tools. If Oeagrus is accused, he is not acquitted before he has recited a passage from '*Niobé*' and he chooses the finest. If a flute-player gains his case, he adjusts his mouth-strap in return and plays us the final air while we are leaving. A father on his death-bed names some husband for his daughter, who is his sole heir; but we care little for his will or for the shell so solemnly placed over the seal; we give the young maiden to him who has best known how to secure our favour. Name me another duty that is so important and so irresponsible.

BDELYCLEON

Aye, it's a fine privilege, and the only one on which I can congratulate you; but surely to violate the will is to act badly towards the heiress.

PHILOCLEON

And if the Senate and the people have trouble in deciding some important case, it is decreed to send the culprits before the Heliasts; then Euathlus and the illustrious Colaonymus, who cast away his shield, swear not to betray us and to fight for the people. Did ever an orator carry the day with his opinion if he had not first declared that the jury should be dismissed for the day as soon as they had given their first verdict? We are the only ones whom Cleon, the great bawler, does not badger. On the contrary, he protects and caresses us; he keeps off the flies, which is what you have never done for your father. Theorus, who is a man not less illustrious than Euphemius, takes the sponge out of the pot and blacks our shoes. See then what good things you deprive and despoil me of. Pray, is this obeying or being a slave, as you pretended to be able to prove?



## BDELYCLEON

Talk away to your heart's content; you must come to a stop at last and then you shall see that this grand power only resembles an anus; no matter how much you wash it, you can never get it clean.

## PHILOCLEON

But I am forgetting the most pleasing thing of all. When I return home with my pay, everyone runs to greet me because of my money. First my daughter bathes me, anoints my feet, stoops to kiss me and, while she is calling me "her dearest father," fishes out my triobolus with her tongue; <sup>11</sup> then my little wife comes to wheedle me and brings a nice light cake; she sits beside me and entreats me in a thousand ways, "Do take this now; do have some more." All this delights me hugely, and I have no need to turn towards you or the steward to know when it shall please him to serve my dinner, all the while cursing and grumbling. But if he does not quickly knead my cake, I have something which is my defence, my shield against all ills. If you do not pour me out drink, I have brought this long-eared jar full of wine. How it brays, when I bend back and bury its neck in my mouth! It farts like a whole army, and how I laugh at your wine-skins. (*With increasing excitement*) As to power, am I not equal to the king of the gods? If our assembly is noisy, all say as they pass, "Great gods! the tribunal is rolling out its thunder!" If I let loose the lightning, the richest, aye, the noblest are half dead with terror and crap for fright. You yourself are afraid of me, yea, by Demeter! you are afraid. But may I die if *you* frighten *me*.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Never have I heard speech so elegant or so sensible.

## PHILOCLEON

Ah! he thought he had only to turn me round his finger; he should, however have known the vigour of my eloquence.

CHORUS (*singing*)

He has said everything without omission. I felt myself grow taller while I listened to him. Methought myself meting out justice in the Islands of the Blest, so much was I taken with the charm of his words.

## BDELYCLEON

How overjoyed they are! What extravagant delight! Ah! ah! you are going to get a thrashing to-day.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Come, plot everything you can to beat him; 'tis not easy to soften me if you do not talk on my side.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you have nothing but nonsense to spout, it's time to buy a good mill-stone, freshly cut withal, to crush my anger.

## BDELYCLEON

The cure of a disease, so inveterate and so widespread in Athens, is a difficult task and of too great importance for the scope of comedy. Nevertheless, my old father . . .

## PHILOCLEON

Cease to call me by that name, for, if you do not prove me a slave and that quickly too, you must die by my hand, even if I must be deprived of my share in the sacred feasts.

## BDELYCLEON

Listen to me, dear little father, unruffle that frowning brow and reckon, you can do so without trouble, not with pebbles, but on your fingers, what is the sum-total of the tribute paid by the allied towns; besides this we have the direct imposts, a mass of percentage dues, the fees of the courts of justice, the produce from the mines, the markets, the harbours, the public lands and the confiscations. All these together amount to nearly two thousand talents. Take from this sum the annual pay of the dicasts; they number six thousand, and there have never been more in this town; so therefore it is one hundred and fifty talents that come to you.

## PHILOCLEON

What! our pay is not even a tithe of the state revenue?

## BDELYCLEON

Why no, certainly not.

## PHILOCLEON

And where does the rest go then?

## BDELYCLEON

To those who say: "I shall never betray the interests of the masses; I shall always fight for the people." And it is you, father, who let yourself be caught with their fine talk, who give them all power over yourself. They are the men who extort fifty talents at a time by threat and intimidation from the allies. "Pay tribute to me," they say, "or I shall loose the lightning on your town and destroy it." And you, you are content to gnaw the crumbs of your own might. What do the allies do? They see that the Athenian mob lives on the tribunal in niggard and miserable fashion, and they count you for nothing, for not more than the vote of Connus; it is on those wretches that they lavish everything, dishes of salt fish,

wine, tapestries, cheese, honey, sesamé-fruit, cushions, flagons, rich clothing, chaplets, necklets, drinking-cups, all that yields pleasure and health. And you, their master, to you as a reward for all your toil both on land and sea, nothing is given, not even a clove of garlic to eat with your little fish.

PHILOCLEON

No, undoubtedly not; I have had to send and buy some from Eucharides. But you told me I was a slave. Prove it then, for I am dying with impatience.

BDELYCLEON

Is it not the worst of all slaveries to see all these wretches and their flatterers, whom they gorge with gold, at the head of affairs? As for you, you are content with the three obols which they give you and which you have so painfully earned in the galleys, in battles and sieges. But what I stomach least is that you go to sit on the tribunal by order. Some young fairy, the son of Chaereas, to wit, enters your house wiggling his arse, foul with debauchery, on his straddling legs and charges you to come and judge at daybreak, and precisely to the minute. "He who presents himself after the opening of the Court," says he, "will not get the triobolus." But he himself, though he arrives late, will nevertheless get his drachma as a public advocate. If an accused man makes him some present, he shares it with a colleague and the pair agree to arrange the matter like two sawyers, one of whom pulls and the other pushes. As for you, you have only eyes for the public pay-clerk, and you see nothing.

PHILOCLEON

Can it be I am treated thus? Oh! what is it you are saying? You stir me to the bottom of my heart! I am all ears! I cannot express what I feel.

BDELYCLEON

Consider then; you might be rich, both you and all the others; I know not why you let yourself be fooled by these folk who call themselves the people's friends. A myriad of towns obey you, from the Euxine to Sardis. What do you gain thereby? Nothing but this miserable pay, and even that is like the oil with which the flock of wool is impregnated and is doled to you drop by drop, just enough to keep you from dying of hunger. They want you to be poor, and I will tell you why. It is so that you may know only those who nourish you, and so that, if it pleases them to loose you against one of their foes, you shall leap upon him with fury. If they wished to assure the well-being of the people, nothing would be easier for them. We have now a thousand towns that pay us tribute; let them com-

mand each of these to feed twenty Athenians; then twenty thousand of our citizens would be eating nothing but hare, would drink nothing but the purest of milk, and always crowned with garlands, would be enjoying the delights to which the great name of their country and the trophies of Marathon give them the right; whereas to-day you are like the hired labourers who gather the olives; you follow him who pays you.

PHILOCLEON

Alas! my hand is benumbed; I can no longer draw my sword. What has become of my strength?

BDELYCLEON

When they are afraid, they promise to divide Eubœa among you and to give each fifty bushels of wheat, but what have they given you? Nothing excepting, quite recently, five bushels of barley, and even these you have only obtained with great difficulty, on proving you were not aliens, and then choenix by choenix. (*With increasing excitement*) That is why I always kept you shut in; I wanted you to be fed by me and no longer at the beck of these blustering braggarts. Even now I am ready to let you have all you want, provided you no longer let yourself be suckled by the pay-clerk.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to BDELYCLEON*)

He was right who said, "Decide nothing till you have heard both sides," for now it seems to me that you are the one who gains the complete victory. My wrath is appeased and I throw away my sticks. (*To PHILOCLEON*) But, you, our comrade and contemporary . . .

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*taking this up in song*)

. . . let yourself be won over by his words; come, be not too obstinate or too perverse. Would that *I* had a relative or kinsman to correct me thus! Clearly some god is at hand and is now protecting you and loading you with benefits. Accept them.

BDELYCLEON

I will feed him, I will give him everything that is suitable for an old man; oatmeal gruel, a cloak, soft furs, and a wench to rub his tool and his loins. But he keeps silent and will not utter a sound; that's a bad sign.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

He has thought the thing over and has recognized his folly; he is reproaching himself for not having followed your advice always. But there he is, converted by your words, and wiser now, so that he will no doubt alter his ways in the future and always believe in none but you.

PHILOCLEON

Alas! alas!

BDELYCLEON

Now why this lamentation?

PHILOCLEON (*in tragic style*)

A truce to your promises! What I love is down there, down there I want to be, there, where the herald cries, "Who has not yet voted? Let him rise!" I want to be the last of all to leave the urn. Oh, my soul, my soul! where art thou? come! oh! dark shadows, make way for me! By Heracles, may I reach the court in time to convict Cleon of theft.

BDELYCLEON

Come, father, in the name of the gods, believe me!

PHILOCLEON

Believe you! Ask me anything, anything, except one.

BDELYCLEON

What is it? Let us hear.

PHILOCLEON

Not to judge any more! Before I consent, I shall have appeared before Pluto.

BDELYCLEON

Very well then, since you find so much pleasure in it, go down there no more, but stay here and deal out justice to your slaves.

PHILOCLEON

But what is there to judge? Are you mad?

BDELYCLEON

Everything as in a tribunal. If a servant opens a door secretly, you inflict upon him a simple fine; that's what you have repeatedly done down there. Everything can be arranged to suit you. If it is warm in the morning, you can judge in the sunlight; if it is snowing, then seated at your fire; if it rains, you go indoors; and if you don't rise till noon, there will be no Thesmothetes to exclude you from the precincts.

PHILOCLEON

The notion pleases me.

BDELYCLEON

Moreover, if a pleader is long-winded, you will not be hungering and chafing and seeking vengeance on the accused.

PHILOCLEON

But could I judge as well with my mouth full?

BDELYCLEON

Much better. Is it not said, that the dicasts, when deceived by lying witnesses, have need to ruminate well in order to arrive at the truth?

PHILOCLEON

Well said, but you have not told me yet who will pay my salary.

BDELYCLEON

I will.

PHILOCLEON

So much the better; in this way I shall be paid by myself. Because that damned jester, Lysistratus, played me an infamous trick the other day. He received a drachma for the two of us and went on the fish-market to get it changed and then brought me back three mullet scales. I took them for obols and crammed them into my mouth; but the smell choked me and I quickly spat them out. So I dragged him before the court.

BDELYCLEON

And what did he say to that?

PHILOCLEON

Well, he pretended I had the stomach of a cock. "You have soon digested the money," he said with a laugh.

BDELYCLEON

You see, that is yet another advantage.

PHILOCLEON

And no small one either. Come, do as you will.

BDELYCLEON

Wait! I will bring everything here.

*(He goes into the house.)*

PHILOCLEON *(to himself)*

You see, the oracles are coming true; I have heard it foretold, that one day the Athenians would dispense justice in their own houses, that each citizen would have himself a little tribunal constructed in his porch similar to the altars of Hecatē, and that there would be such before every door.

BDELYCLEON *(returning with slaves who are carrying various objects)*

There, what do you think of that? I have brought you everything

needful and much more into the bargain. See, here is a thunder-mug in case you have to pee; I shall hang it up beside you.

PHILOCLEON

Good idea! Right useful at my age. You have found the true alleviation of bladder troubles.

BDELYCLEON

Here is a fire, and near to it are lentils, should you want to have a bite to eat.

PHILOCLEON

That's admirably arranged. In this way, even when feverish, I shall nevertheless receive my pay; and besides, I could eat my lentils without quitting my seat. But why this cock?

BDELYCLEON

So that, should you doze during some pleading, he may awaken you by crowing up there.

PHILOCLEON

I want only for one thing more; all the rest is as good as can be.

BDELYCLEON

What is that?

PHILOCLEON

If only they could bring me an image of the hero Lycus.

BDELYCLEON

Here it is! Why, you might think it was the god himself!

PHILOCLEON

Oh! hero, my master! how repulsive you are to look at!

BDELYCLEON

He looks just like Cleonymus.

PHILOCLEON

That is why, hero though he be, he has no weapon.

BDELYCLEON

The sooner you take your seat, the sooner I shall call a case.

PHILOCLEON

Call it, for I have been seated ever so long.

BDELYCLEON

Let us see. What case shall we bring up first? Is there a slave who has done something wrong? Ah! you Thracian there, you burnt the stew-pot the other day.

PHILOCLEON

Wait, wait! This is a fine state of affairs! You almost made me judge without a bar, and that is the most sacred thing of all for us.

BDELYCLEON

There isn't any, by Zeus.

PHILOCLEON

I'll run indoors and get one myself. (*Exit*)

BDELYCLEON

What does it matter? Terrible thing, the force of habit.

XANTHIAS (*coming out of the house*)

Damn that animal! How can anyone keep such a dog?

BDELYCLEON

Hullo! what's the matter?

XANTHIAS

Oh, it's Labes, who has just rushed into the kitchen and seized a whole Sicilian cheese and gobbled it up.

BDELYCLEON

Good! this will be the first offence I shall make my father try. (*To XANTHIAS*) Come along and lay your accusation.

XANTHIAS

No, not I; the other dog vows he will be accuser, if the matter is brought up for trial.

BDELYCLEON

Well then, bring them both along.

XANTHIAS

That's what we'll have to do.

(*He goes back into the house. A moment later PHILOCLEON comes out.*)

BDELYCLEON

What is this?

PHILOCLEON

The pig-trough of the swine dedicated to Hestia.



BDELYCLEON

Did you steal it from a shrine?

PHILOCLEON

No, no, by addressing Hestia first, I might, thanks to her, crush an adversary. But put an end to delay by calling up the case. My verdict is already settled.

BDELYCLEON

Wait! I still have to bring out the tablets and the scrolls.

*(He goes into the house.)*

PHILOCLEON

Oh! I am boiling, I am dying with impatience at your delays. I could have traced the sentence in the dust.

BDELYCLEON (*coming out with tablets and scrolls*)

There you are.

PHILOCLEON

Then call the case.

BDELYCLEON

Right. Who is first on the docket?

PHILOCLEON

My god! This is unbearable! I have forgotten the urns.

BDELYCLEON

Now where are you going?

PHILOCLEON

To look for the urns.

BDELYCLEON

Don't bother, I have these pots.

PHILOCLEON

Very well, then we have all we need, except the clepsydra.

BDELYCLEON (*pointing to the thunder-mug*)

What is this if it is not a clepsydra?

PHILOCLEON

You know how to supply everything.

## BDELYCLEON

Let fire be brought quickly from the house with myrtle boughs and incense, and let us invoke the gods before opening the sitting.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Offer them libations and your vows and we will thank them that a noble agreement has put an end to your bickerings and strife. And first let there be a sacred silence.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! god of Delphi! oh! Phoebus Apollo! convert into the greatest blessing for us all what is now happening before this house, and cure us of our error, oh, Paean, our helper!

BDELYCLEON (*solemnly*)

Oh! Powerful god, Apollo Agueus, who watchest at the door of my entrance hall, accept this fresh sacrifice; I offer it that you may deign to soften my father's excessive severity; he is as hard as iron, his heart is like sour wine; do thou pour into it a little honey. Let him become gentle toward other men, let him take more interest in the accused than in the accusers, may he allow himself to be softened by entreaties; calm his acrid humour and deprive his irritable mind of all sting.

CHORUS (*singing*)

We unite our vows and chants to those of this new magistrate. His words have won our favour and we are convinced that he loves the people more than any of the young men of the present day. (XANTHIAS *brings in two persons costumed as dogs, but with masks that suggest Laches and Cleon.*)

## BDELYCLEON

If there be any judge near at hand, let him enter; once the proceedings have opened, we shall admit him no more.

## PHILOCLEON

Who is the defendant?

## BDELYCLEON

This one.

PHILOCLEON (*aside*)

He does not stand a chance.

## BDELYCLEON

Listen to the indictment. A dog of Cydathenaea doth hereby charge Labes of Aexonia with having devoured a Sicilian cheese by himself without accomplices. Penalty demanded, a collar of fig-tree wood.

PHILOCLEON

Nay, a dog's death, if convicted.

BDELYCLEON

This is Labes, the defendant.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! what a wretched brute! how entirely he looks the rogue! He thinks to deceive me by keeping his jaws closed. Where is the plaintiff, the dog of Cydathenaea?

DOG

Bow wow! bow wow!

BDELYCLEON

Here he is.

PHILOCLEON

Why, he's another Labes, a great barker and a lick of dishes.

BDELYCLEON (*as Herald*)

Silence! Keep your seats! (*To the Cydathenacan dog.*) And you, up on your feet and accuse him.

PHILOCLEON

Go on, and I will help myself and eat these lentils.

DOG

Gentlemen of the jury, listen to this indictment I have drawn up. He has committed the blackest of crimes, against both me and the seamen. He sought refuge in a dark corner to glutton on a big Sicilian cheese, with which he sated his hunger.

PHILOCLEON

Why, the crime is clear; the filthy brute this very moment belched forth a horrible odour of cheese right under my nose.

DOG

And he refused to share with me. And yet can anyone style himself your benefactor, when he does not cast a morsel to your poor dog?

PHILOCLEON

He has not shared anything, not even with his comrade. His madness is as hot as my lentils.

BDELYCLEON

In the name of the gods, father! No hurried verdict without hearing the other side!

PHILOCLEON

But the evidence is plain; the fact speaks for itself.

Dog

Then beware of acquitting the most selfish of canine gluttons, who has devoured the whole cheese, rind and all, prowling round the platter.

PHILOCLEON

There is not even enough left for me to fill up the chinks in my pitcher.

Dog

Besides, you *must* punish him, because the same house cannot keep two thieves. Let me not have barked in vain, else I shall never bark again.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! the black deeds he has just denounced! What a shameless thief! Say, cock, is not that your opinion too? Ha, ha! He thinks as I do. Here, Thesmothetes! where are you? Hand me the thunder-mug.

BDELYCLEON

Get it yourself. I go to call the witnesses; these are a plate, a pestle, a cheese knife, a brazier, a stew-pot and other half-burnt utensils. (*To PHILOCLEON*) But you have not finished? you are piddling away still! Have done and be seated.

PHILOCLEON

Ha, ha! I reckon I know somebody who will crap for fright to-day.

BDELYCLEON

Will you never cease showing yourself hard and intractable, and especially to the accused? You tear them to pieces tooth and nail. (*To LABES*) Come forward and defend yourself. What means this silence? Answer.

PHILOCLEON

No doubt he has nothing to say.

BDELYCLEON

Not at all, I think he has got what happened once to Thucydides in court; his jaws suddenly set fast. Get away! I will undertake your defence.—Gentlemen of the jury, it is a difficult thing to speak for a dog who has been calumniated, but nevertheless I will try. He is a good dog, and he chases wolves finely.

PHILOCLEON

He is a thief and a conspirator.

BDELYCLEON

No, he is the best of all our dogs; he is capable of guarding a whole flock.

PHILOCLEON

And what good is that, if he eats the cheese?

BDELYCLEON

What? he fights for you, he guards your door; he is an excellent dog in every respect. Forgive him his larceny! he is wretchedly ignorant, he cannot play the lyre.

PHILOCLEON

I wish he did not know how to write either; then the rascal would not have drawn up his pleadings.

BDELYCLEON

Witnesses, I pray you, listen. Come forward, grating-knife, and speak up; answer me clearly. You were paymaster at the time. Did you grate out to the soldiers what was given you?—He says he did so.

PHILOCLEON

But, by Zeus! he lies.

BDELYCLEON

Oh! have patience. Take pity on the unfortunate. Labes feeds only on fish-bones and fishes' heads and has not an instant of peace. The other is good only to guard the house; he never moves from here, but demands his share of all that is brought in and bites those who refuse.

PHILOCLEON (*aside*)

Oh! Heaven! have I fallen ill? I feel my anger cooling! Woe to me! I am softening!

BDELYCLEON

Have pity, father, pity, I adjure you; you would not have him dead. Where are his puppies? (*A group of children costumed as puppies comes out.*) Come, poor little beasties, yap, up on your haunches, beg and whine!

PHILOCLEON

Descend, descend, descend, descend! <sup>15</sup>

BDELYCLEON

I will descend, although that word, "descend," has too often raised false hope. None the less, I will descend.

PHILOCLEON

Plague seize it! Have I then done wrong to eat! What! I, crying! Ah! I certainly should not be weeping, if I were not stuffed with lentils.

BDELYCLEON

Then he is acquitted?

PHILOCLEON

It is difficult to tell.

BDELYCLEON

Ah! my dear father, be good! be humane! Take this voting pebble and rush with your eyes closed to that second urn and, father, acquit him.

PHILOCLEON

No, I know no more how to acquit than to play the lyre.

BDELYCLEON

Come quickly, I will show you the way.

*(He takes his father by the hand and leads him to the second urn.)*

PHILOCLEON

Is this the first urn?

BDELYCLEON

Yes.

PHILOCLEON *(dropping in his vote)*

Then I have voted.

BDELYCLEON *(aside)*

I have fooled him and he has acquitted in spite of himself. *(To PHILOCLEON)* Come, I will turn out the urns.

PHILOCLEON

What is the result?

BDELYCLEON

We shall see. *(He examines both urns.)* Labes, you stand acquitted. *(PHILOCLEON faints)* Eh! father, what's the matter, what is it? *(To slaves)* Water! water! *(To PHILOCLEON)* Pull yourself together, sir!

PHILOCLEON (*weakly*)

Tell me! Is he really acquitted?

BDELYCLEON

Yes, certainly.

PHILOCLEON (*falling back*)

Then it's all over with me!

BDELYCLEON

Courage, dear father, don't let this afflict you so terribly.

PHILOCLEON (*dolefully*)

And so I have charged my conscience with the acquittal of an accused being! What will become of me? Sacred gods! forgive me. I did it despite myself; it is not in my character.

BDELYCLEON

Do not vex yourself, father; I will feed you well, will take you everywhere to eat and drink with me; you shall go to every feast; henceforth your life shall be nothing but pleasure, and Hyperbolus shall no longer have you for a tool. But come, let us go in.

PHILOCLEON (*resignedly*)

So be it; if you will, let us go in.

*(They all go into the house.)*

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Go where it pleases you and may your happiness be great. (*The CHORUS turns and faces the audience.*) You meanwhile, oh! countless myriads, listen to the sound counsels I am going to give you and take care they are not lost upon you. That would be the fate of vulgar spectators, not that of such an audience. Hence, people, lend me your ear, if you love frank speaking.

The poet has a reproach to make against his audience; he says you have ill-treated him in return for the many services he has rendered you. At first he kept himself in the background and lent help secretly to other poets, and like the prophetic Genius, who hid himself in the belly of Eurycles, slipped within the spirit of another and whispered to him many a comic hit. Later he ran the risks of the theatre on his own account, with his face uncovered, and dared to guide his Muse unaided. Though overlaid with success and honours more than any of your poets, indeed despite all his glory, he does not yet believe he has attained his goal; his heart is not swollen with pride and he does not seek to seduce the young folk in the wrestling school. If any lover runs up to him to complain be-

cause he is furious at seeing the object of his passion derided on the stage, he takes no heed of such reproaches, for he is inspired only with honest motives and his Muse is no pander. From the very outset of his dramatic career he has disclaimed to assail those who were men, but with a courage worthy of Heracles himself he attacked the most formidable monsters, and at the beginning went straight for that beast with the sharp teeth, with the terrible eyes that flashed lambent fire like those of Cynna, surrounded by a hundred lewd flatterers who spittle-licked him to his heart's content; he had a voice like a roaring torrent, the stench of a seal, the unwashed balls of a Lamia, and the arse of a camel. Our poet did not tremble at the sight of this horrible monster, nor did he dream of gaining him over; and again this very day he is fighting for your good. Last year besides, he attacked those pale, shivering and feverish beings who strangled your fathers in the dark, throttled your grandfathers, and who, lying in the beds of the most inoffensive, piled up against them lawsuits, summonses and witnesses to such an extent, that many of them flew in terror to the Polemarch for refuge. Such is the champion you have found to purify your country of all its evil, and last year you betrayed him, when he sowed the most novel ideas, which, however, did not strike root, because you did not understand their value; notwithstanding this, he swears by Bacchus, the while offering him libations, that none ever heard better comic verses. It is a disgrace to you not to have caught their drift at once; as for the poet, he is none the less appreciated by the *enlightened* judges. He shivered his oars in rushing boldly forward to board his foe. (*With increasing excitement*) But in future, my dear fellow-citizens, love and honour more those of your poets who seek to imagine and express some new thought. Make their ideas your own, keep them in your caskets like sweet-scented fruit. If you do, your clothing will emit an odour of wisdom the whole year through.

#### FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Ah, once long ago we were brave in the dance, brave too in battle, and on this account alone the most courageous of men! That was formerly, was formerly; all that is gone now and these hairs of ours are whiter than the swan. But from what is left we must rekindle a youthful ardour; really we prefer our old age to the curly hair and the fine clothes and the effeminacy of many of the young.

#### LEADER OF THE FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Should any among you spectators look upon me with wonder, because of this wasp waist, or not know the meaning of this sting, I will soon dispel his ignorance. We, who wear this appendage, are the true Attic men, who alone are noble and native to the soil, the bravest of all people. We



are the ones who, weapon in hand, did so much for the country, when the barbarian shed torrents of fire and smoke over our city in his relentless desire to seize our nests by force. At once we ran up, armed with lance and buckler, and, drunk with the bitter wine of anger, we gave them battle, man standing to man and rage distorting our lips. A hail of arrows hid the sky. However, by the help of the gods, we drove off the foe towards evening. Before the battle an owl had flown over our army. Then we pursued them with our lance-point in their loins as one hunts the tunny-fish; they fled and we stung them in the jaw and in the eyes, so that even now the barbarians tell each other that there is nothing in the world more to be feared than the Attic wasp.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! at that time I was terrible, I feared nothing; forth on my galleys I went in search of my foe and subjected him. Then we never thought of rounding fine phrases, we never dreamt of calumny; it was who should prove the strongest rower. And thus we took many a town from the Medes, and 'tis to us that Athens owes the tributes that our young men thief to-day.

LEADER OF THE SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Look well at us, and you will see that we have all the character and habits of the wasp. Firstly, if roused, no beings are more irascible, more relentless than we are. In all other things, too, we act like wasps. We collect in swarms, in a kind of nests, and some go judging with the Archon, some with the Eleven, others at the Odeon; there are yet others, who hardly move at all, like the grubs in the cells, but remain glued to the walls, and bent double to the ground. We also pay full attention to the discovery of all sorts of means of existing and sting the first who comes, so as to live at his expense. Finally, we have among us drones, who have no sting and who, without giving themselves the least trouble, seize on our revenues as they flow past them and devour them. It's this that grieves us most of all, to see men who have never served or held either lance or oar in defence of their country, enriching themselves at our expense without ever raising a blister on their hands. In short, I give it as my deliberate opinion that in future every citizen not possessed of a sting shall not receive the triobolus.

(PHILOCLEON *comes out of the house, followed by his son and a slave.*  
*The CHORUS turns to face them.*)

PHILOCLEON

As long as I live, I will never give up this cloak; it's the one I wore in that battle when Boreas delivered us from such fierce attacks.

BDELYCLEON

You do not know what is good for you.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I do not know how to use fine clothing! The other day, when cramming myself with fried fish, I dropped so many grease spots that I had to pay three obols to the cleaner.

BDELYCLEON

At least have a try, since you have once for all handed the care for your well-being over to me.

PHILOCLEON

Very well then! what must I do?

BDELYCLEON

Take off your cloak, and put on this tunic in its stead.

PHILOCLEON

Was it worth while to beget and bring up children, so that this one should now wish to choke me?

BDELYCLEON

Come, take this tunic and put it on without so much talk.

PHILOCLEON

Great gods! what sort of a cursed garment is this?

BDELYCLEON

Some call it a pelisse, others a Persian cloak.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I thought it was a wraprascal like those made at Thymaetis.

BDELYCLEON

No wonder. It's only at Sardis you could have seen them, and you have never been there.

PHILOCLEON

Of course not, but it seems to me exactly like the mantle Morychus sports.

BDELYCLEON

Not at all; I tell you they are woven at Ecbatana.

PHILOCLEON

What! are there woollen ox-guts <sup>10</sup> then at Ecbatana?

BDELYCLEON

Whatever are you talking about? These are woven by the barbarians at great cost. I am certain this pelisse has consumed more than a talent of wool.

PHILOCLEON

It should be called wool-waster then instead of pelisse.

BDELYCLEON

Come, father, just hold still for a moment and put it on.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! horrors! what a waft of heat the hussy sends up my nose!

BDELYCLEON

Will you have done with this fooling?

PHILOCLEON

No by Zeus.

BDELYCLEON

But, good sir, . . .

PHILOCLEON

If need be, I prefer you should put me in the oven.

BDELYCLEON

Come, I will put it round you. There!

PHILOCLEON

At all events, bring out a crook.

BDELYCLEON

Why, whatever for?

PHILOCLEON

To drag me out of it before I am quite melted.

BDELYCLEON

Now take off those wretched clogs and put on these nice Laconian slippers.

PHILOCLEON

I put on odious slippers made by our foes! Never!

BDELYCLEON

Come! put your foot in and push hard. Quick!

PHILOCLEON

You're doing wrong here. You want me to put my foot on Laconian ground.

BDELYCLEON

Now the other.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! no, not that foot; one of its toes holds the Laconians in horror.

BDELYCLEON

Positively you must.

PHILOCLEON

Alas! alas! Then I shall have no chilblains in my old age.

BDELYCLEON

Now, hurry up and get them on; and now imitate the easy effeminate gait of the rich. See, like this.

*(He takes a few steps.)*

PHILOCLEON *(trying to do likewise)*

There! . . . Look at my get-up and tell me which rich man I most resemble in my walk.

BDELYCLEON

Why, you look like a garlic plaster on a boil.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I am longing to swagger and sway my arse about.

BDELYCLEON

Now, will you know how to talk gravely with well-informed men of good class?

PHILOCLEON

Undoubtedly.

BDELYCLEON

What will you say to them?

PHILOCLEON

Oh, lots of things. First of all I shall say, that Lamia, seeing herself caught, let flee a fart; then, that Cardopion and his mother . . .

BDELYCLEON

Come, no fabulous tales, pray! talk of realities, of domestic facts, as is usually done.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I know something that is indeed most domestic. Once upon a time there was a rat and a cat . . .

BDELYCLEON

"Oh, you ignorant fool," as Theagenes said to the dung-gatherer in a rage. Are you going to talk of cats and rats among high-class people?

PHILOCLEON

Then what should I talk about?

BDELYCLEON

Tell some dignified story. Relate how you were sent on a solemn mission with Androcles and Clisthenes.

PHILOCLEON

On a mission! never in my life, except once to Paros, a job which brought me in two obols a day.<sup>17</sup>

BDELYCLEON

At least say, that you have just seen Ephudion doing well in the pancratium with Ascondas and, that despite his age and his white hair, he is still robust in loin and arm and flank and that his chest is a very breast-plate.

PHILOCLEON

Stop! stop! what nonsense! Who ever contested at the pancratium with a breast-plate on?

BDELYCLEON

That is how well-behaved folk like to talk. But another thing. When at wine, it would be fitting to relate some good story of your youthful days. What is your most brilliant feat?

PHILOCLEON

My best feat? Ah! when I stole Ergasion's vine-props.

BDELYCLEON

You and your vine-props! you'll be the death of me! Tell of one of your boar-hunts or of when you coursed the hare. Talk about some torch-race you were in; tell of some deed of daring.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! my most daring deed was when, quite a young man still, I prosecuted Phayllus, the runner, for defamation, and he was condemned by a majority of two votes.

BDELYCLEON

Enough of that! Now recline there, and practise the bearing that is fitting at table in society.

PHILOCLEON

How must I recline? Tell me quick!

BDELYCLEON

In an elegant style.

PHILOCLEON (*lying on the ground*)

Like this?

BDELYCLEON

Not at all.

PHILOCLEON

How then?

BDELYCLEON

Spread your knees on the tapestries and give your body the most easy curves, like those taught in the gymnasium. Then praise some bronze vase, survey the ceiling, admire the awning stretched over the court. Water is poured over our hands; the tables are spread; we sup and, after ablution, we now offer libations to the gods.

PHILOCLEON

But, by Zeus! this supper is but a dream, it appears!

BDELYCLEON

The flute-player has finished the prelude. The guests are Theorus, Aeschines, Phanus, Cleon, Acestor; and beside this last, I don't know who else. You are with them. Shall you know exactly how to take up the songs that are started?

PHILOCLEON

Quite well.

BDELYCLEON

Really?

PHILOCLEON

Better than any born mountaineer of Attica.

BDELYCLEON

That we shall see. Suppose me to be Cleon. I am the first to begin the song of Harmodius, and you take it up: "There never yet was seen in Athens . . .

PHILOCLEON

. . . such a rogue or such a thief."<sup>18</sup>

BDELYCLEON

Why, you wretched man, it will be the end of you if you sing that. He will vow your ruin, your destruction, to chase you out of the country.

PHILOCLEON

Well! then I shall answer his threats with another song: "With your madness for supreme power, you will end by overthrowing the city, which even now totters towards ruin."

BDELYCLEON

And when Theorus, prone at Cleon's feet, takes his hand and sings, "Like Admetus, love those who are brave," what reply will you make him?

PHILOCLEON

I shall sing, "I know not how to play the fox, nor call myself the friend of both parties."

BDELYCLEON

Then comes the turn of Aeschines, the son of Sellus, and a well-trained and clever musician, who will sing, "Good things and riches for Clitagora and me and eke for the Thessalians!"

PHILOCLEON

"The two of us have squandered a great deal between us."

BDELYCLEON

At this game you seem at home. But come, we will go and dine with Philoctemon.—Slave! slave! place our dinner in a basket; we are going out for a good long drinking bout.

PHILOCLEON

By no means, it is too dangerous; for after drinking, one breaks in doors, one comes to blows, one batters everything. Anon, when the wine is slept off, one is forced to pay.

## BDELYCLEON

Not if you are with decent people. Either they undertake to appease the offended person or, better still, you say something witty, you tell some comic story, perhaps one of those you have yourself heard at table, either in Aesop's style or in that of Sybaris; everyone laughs and the trouble is ended.

## PHILOCLEON

Faith! it's worth while learning many stories then, if you are thus not punished for the ill you do. But come, no more delay!

*(They go out.)*

CHORUS (*singing*)

More than once have I given proof of cunning and never of stupidity, but how much more clever is Amyntas, the son of Sellus and of the race of forelock-wearers; him we saw one day coming to dine with Leogaras, bringing as his share one apple and a pomegranate, and bear in mind he was as hungry as Antiphon. He went on an embassy to Pharsalus, and there he lived solely among the Thessalian mercenaries; indeed, is he not the vilest of mercenaries himself?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! blessed, oh! fortunate Automenes, how enviable is your fortune! You have three sons, the most industrious in the world; one is the friend of all, a very able man, the first among the lyre-players, the favourite of the Graces. The second is an actor, and his talent is beyond all praise. As for Aripheides, he is by far the most gifted; his father would swear to me, that without any master whatever and solely through the spontaneous effort of his happy nature, he taught himself to exercise his tongue in the whorehouses, where he spends the whole of his time.

Some have said that I and Cleon were reconciled. This is the truth of the matter: Cleon was harassing me, persecuting and belabouring me in every way; and, when I was being fleeced, the public laughed at seeing me uttering such loud cries; not that they cared about me, but simply curious to know whether, when trodden down by my enemy, I would not hurl at him some taunt. Noticing this, I have played the wheedler a bit; but now, look! the prop is deceiving the vine!

*(XANTHIAS enters, weeping and wailing and rubbing his sides.)*

## XANTHIAS

Oh! tortoises! happy to have so hard a skin! Oh! creatures full of sense! what a happy thought to cover your bodies with this shell, which shields it from blows! As for me, I can no longer move; the stick has so belaboured my body.



## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why, what's the matter, my child? for, old as he may be, one has the right to call anyone a child who has let himself be beaten.

## XANTHIAS

Alas! my master is really the worst of all plagues. He was the most drunk of all the guests, and yet among them were Hippyllus, Antiphon, Lycon, Lysistratus, Theophrastus and Phrynichus. But he was a hundred times more insolent than any. As soon as he had stuffed himself with a host of good dishes, he began to leap and spring, to laugh and to fart like a little ass well stuffed with barley. Then he set to beating me with all his heart, shouting, "Slave! slave!" Lysistratus, as soon as he saw him, let fly this comparison at him. "Old fellow," said he, "you resemble one of the scum assuming the airs of a rich man or a stupid ass that has broken loose from its stable." "As for you," bawled the other at the top of his voice, "you are like a grasshopper, whose cloak is worn to the thread, or like Sthenelus after his clothes had been sold." All applauded excepting Theophrastus, who made a grimace as behoved a well-bred man like him. The old man called to him, "Hi! tell me then what you have to be proud of? Not so much mouthing, you, who so well know how to play the buffoon and to lick-spittle the rich!" In this way he insulted each in turn with the grossest of jests, and he reeled off a thousand of the most absurd and ridiculous speeches. At last, when he was thoroughly drunk, he started towards here, striking everyone he met. Wait, here he comes reeling along. I will be off for fear of his blows.

(PHILOCLEON *enters, inebriated and hilarious, carrying a torch; his other hand is occupied with a wholly nude flute-girl; he is followed by a group of angry victims of his exuberance.*)

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

Halt! and let everyone begone, or I shall do an evil turn to some of those who insist on following me. Clear off, rascals, or I shall roast you with this torch!

## GUEST

We shall all make you smart to-morrow for your youthful pranks. We shall come in a body to summon you to justice.

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

Ho! ho! summon *me*? what old women's babble! Know that I can no longer bear to hear even the name of suits. Ha! ha! ha! *this* is what pleases *me*, "Down with the urns!" Get out of here! Down with the dicasts! away with them, away with them!

(*Dropping into speech; to the flute-girl*)

Mount up there, my little gilded cock-chafer; take hold of this rope's end in your hand. Hold it tight, but have a care; the rope's a bit old and worn. But even though it's worn, it still has its virtues. Do you see how opportunely I got you away from the solicitations of those fellators, who wanted you to make love to them in their own odd way? You therefore owe me this return to gratify me. But will you pay the debt? Oh! I know well you will not even try; you will play with me, you will laugh heartily at me as you have done at many another man. And yet, if you would not be a naughty girl, I would redeem you, when my son is dead, and you should be my concubine, my little one. At present I am not my own master; I am very young and am watched very closely. My dear son never lets me out of his sight; he's an unbearable creature, who would quarter a thread and skin a flint; he is afraid I should get lost, for I am his only father. But here he comes running towards us. But be quick, don't stir, hold these torches. I am going to play him a young man's trick, the same as he played me before I was initiated into the mysteries.

BDELYCLEON

Oh! oh! you debauched old dotard! you are amorous, it seems, of pretty baggages; but, by Apollo, it shall not be with impunity!

PHILOCLEON

Ah! you would be very glad to eat a lawsuit in vinegar, you would.

BDELYCLEON

Only a rascal would steal the flute-girl away from the other guests.

PHILOCLEON

What flute-girl? Are you distraught, as if you had just returned from Pluto?

BDELYCLEON

By Zeus! But here is the Dardanian wench in person.

PHILOCLEON

Nonsense. This is a torch that I have lit in the public square in honour of the gods.

BDELYCLEON

Is this a torch?

PHILOCLEON

A torch? Certainly. Do you not see it is of several different colours?

BDELYCLEON

And what is that black part in the middle?

PHILOCLEON

That's the pitch running out while it burns.

BDELYCLEON

And there, on the other side, surely that is a girl's bottom?

PHILOCLEON

No. That's just a small bit of the torch, that projects.

BDELYCLEON

What do you mean? what bit? Hi! you woman! come here!

PHILOCLEON

Oh! What do you want to do?

BDELYCLEON

To take her away from you and lead her off. You are too much worn out and can do nothing.

*(He takes the girl into the house.)*

PHILOCLEON

Listen to me! One day, at Olympia, I saw Euphudion boxing bravely against Ascondas; he was already aged, and yet with a blow from his fist he knocked down his young opponent. So watch out that I don't blacken *your* eyes.

BDELYCLEON (*who has returned*)

By Zeus! you have Olympia at your finger-ends!

*(A BAKER'S WIFE enters with an empty basket; she brings CHAEREPHON with her as witness.)*

BAKER'S WIFE (*to CHAEREPHON*)

Come to my help, I beg you, in the name of the gods! This cursed man, when striking out right and left with his torch, knocked over ten loaves worth an obolus apiece, and then, to cap the deal, four others.

BDELYCLEON

Do you see what lawsuits you are drawing upon yourself with your drunkenness? You will have to plead.

PHILOCLEON

Oh, no, no! a little pretty talk and pleasant tales will soon settle the matter and reconcile her with me.

## BAKER'S WIFE

Not so, by the goddesses twain! It shall not be said that you have with impunity spoilt the wares of Myrtia, the daughter of Ancylicon and Sostraté.

## PHILOCLEON

Listen, woman, I wish to tell you a lovely anecdote.

## BAKER'S WIFE

By Zeus, no anecdotes for me, thank you.

## PHILOCLEON

One night Aesop was going out to supper. A drunken bitch had the impudence to bark near him. Aesop said to her, "Oh, bitch, bitch! you would do well to sell your wicked tongue and buy some wheat."

## BAKER'S WIFE

You make a mock of me! Very well! I don't care who you are, I shall summons you before the market inspectors for damage done to my business. Chaerephon here shall be my witness.

## PHILOCLEON

But just listen, here's another will perhaps please you better. Lasus and Simonides were contesting against each other for the singing prize. Lasus said, "Damned if I care."

## BAKER'S WIFE

Ah! really, did he now!

## PHILOCLEON

As for you, Chaerephon, *can* you be witness to this woman, who looks as pale and tragic as Ino when she throws herself from her rock . . . at the feet of Euripides?

*(The BAKER'S WIFE and CHAEREPHON depart.)*

## BDELYCLEON

Here, I suppose, comes another to summons you; *he* has his witness too. Ah! unhappy indeed we are!

*(A badly bruised man enters.)*

## ACCUSER

I summons you, old man, for outrage.

## BDELYCLEON

For outrage? Oh! in the name of the gods, do not summons him! I will be answerable for him; name the price and I will be more more grateful still.

## PHILOCLEON

I ask for nothing better than to be reconciled with him; for I admit I struck him and threw stones at him. So, first come here. Will you leave it in my hands to name the indemnity I must pay, if I promise you my friendship as well, or will you fix it yourself?

## ACCUSER

Fix it; I like neither lawsuits nor disputes.

## PHILOCLEON

A man of Sybaris fell from his chariot and wounded his head most severely; he was a very poor driver. One of his friends came up to him and said, "Every man to his trade." Well then, go you to Pittalus to get mended.

## BDELYCLEON

You are incorrigible.

ACCUSER (*to his witness*)

At all events, make a note of his reply. (*They start to leave.*)

## PHILOCLEON

Listen, instead of going off so abruptly. A woman at Sybaris broke a box.

ACCUSER (*to his witness*)

I again ask you to witness this.

## PHILOCLEON

The box therefore had the fact attested, but the woman said, "Never worry about witnessing the matter, but hurry off to buy a cord to tie it together with; that will be the more sensible course."

## ACCUSER

Oh! go on with your ribaldry until the Archon calls the case.

(*He and his witness depart.*)

BDELYCLEON (*to PHILOCLEON*)

By Demeter! you'll stay here no longer! I am going to take you and carry you off.

## PHILOCLEON

And what for?

## BDELYCLEON

What for? I am going to carry you into the house, so that the accusers will not run out of witnesses.

PHILOCLEON

One day at Delphi, Aesop . . .

BDELYCLEON

I don't care a fig for that.

PHILOCLEON

. . . was accused of having stolen a sacred vase. But he replied, that the horn-beetle . . .

BDELYCLEON

Oh, dear, dear! You'll drive me crazy with your horn-beetle.

(PHILOCLEON goes on with his fable while BDELYCLEON is carrying him off the scene by main force.)

CHORUS (*singing*) .

I envy you your happiness, old man. What a contrast to his former frugal habits and his very hard life! Taught now in quite another school, he will know nothing but the pleasures of ease. Perhaps he will jibe at it, for indeed it is difficult to renounce what has become one's second nature. However, many have done it, and adopting the ideas of others, have changed their use and wont. As for Philocleon's son, I, like all wise and judicious men, cannot sufficiently praise his filial tenderness and his tact. Never have I met a more amiable nature, and I have conceived the greatest fondness for him. How he triumphed on every point in his discussion with his father, when he wanted to bring him back to more worthy and honourable tastes!

XANTHIAS (*coming out of the house*)

By Bacchus! Some Evil Genius has brought this unbearable disorder into our house. The old man, full up with wine and excited by the sound of the flute, is so delighted, so enraptured, that he is spending the night executing the old dances that Thespis first produced on the stage, and just now he offered to prove to the modern tragedians, by disputing with them for the dancing prize, that they are nothing but a lot of old dotards. (BDELYCLEON comes out of the house with his father who is costumed as POLYPHEMUS in Euripides' Cyclops.)

PHILOCLEON

"Who loiters at the door of the vestibule?"

XANTHIAS

Here comes our pest, our plague!

PHILOCLEON

Let down the barriers. The dance is now to begin.  
(*He begins to dance in a manner grotesquely parodying that of Euripides.*)

XANTHIAS

Or rather the madness.

PHILOCLEON

Impetuous movement already twists and racks my sides. How my nostrils wheeze! how my back cracks!

XANTHIAS

Go and fill yourself with hellebore.

PHILOCLEON

Phrynichus is as bold as a cock and terrifies his rivals.

XANTHIAS

He'll be stoned.

PHILOCLEON

His leg kicks out sky-high . . .

XANTHIAS

. . . and his arse gapes open.

PHILOCLEON

Mind your own business. Look how easily my leg-joints move. Isn't that good?

XANTHIAS

God, no, it's merely insane!

PHILOCLEON

And now I summon and challenge my rivals. If there be a tragic poet who pretends to be a skilful dancer, let him come and contest the matter with me. Is there one? Is there *not* one?

XANTHIAS

Here comes one, and one only.

(*A very small dancer, costumed as a crab, enters.*)

PHILOCLEON

Who is the wretch?

XANTHIAS

The younger son of Carcinus.

## PHILOCLEON

I will crush him to nothing; in point of keeping time, I will knock him out, for he knows nothing of rhythm.

## XANTHIAS

Ah! ah! here comes his brother too, another tragedian, and another son of Carcinus.

*(Another dancer, hardly larger than the first, and similarly costumed, enters.)*

## PHILOCLEON

Him I will devour for my dinner.

## XANTHIAS

Oh! ye gods! I see nothing but crabs. Here is yet another son of Carcinus.

*(A third dancer enters, likewise resembling a crab, but smaller than either of the others.)*

## PHILOCLEON

What's this? A shrimp or a spider?

## XANTHIAS

It's a crab,—a hermit-crab, the smallest of its kind; it writes tragedies.

## PHILOCLEON

Oh! Carcinus, how proud you should be of your brood! What a crowd of kinglets have come swooping down here! But we shall have to measure ourselves against them. Have marinade prepared for seasoning them, in case I prove the victor.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us stand out of the way a little, so that they may twirl at their ease.

## CHORUS

*(It divides in two and accompanies with its song the wild dancing of PHILOCLEON and the sons of CARCINUS in the centre of the Orchestra.)*

Come, illustrious children of this inhabitant of the brine, brothers of the shrimps, skip on the sand and the shore of the barren sea; show us the lightning whirls and twirls of your nimble limbs. Glorious offspring of Phrynichus, let fly your kicks, so that the spectators may be overjoyed at seeing your legs so high in air. Twist, twirl, tap your bellies, kick your legs to the sky. Here comes your famous father, the ruler of the sea, delighted to see his three lecherous kinglets.<sup>19</sup> Go on



with your dancing, if it pleases you, but as for us, we shall not join you. Lead us promptly off the stage, for never a comedy yet was seen where the Chorus finished off with a dance.

#### NOTES FOR THE WASPS

1. The reference is to Cleon; see the Glossary.
2. A pun on the Greek words *dēmos*, "people" and *demós*, "fat." Aristophanes has used this before; see note 13 on *The Knights*.
3. "Going to the crows" was the ancient way of "going to Hell."
4. The implication is that certain other poets had sought to gain the favour of the audience by incorporating in their comedies scenes in which such distributions were made.
5. The poet has consoled himself by ascribing the failure of *The Clouds* the year before to the stupidity of the spectators, and there is no reason to doubt that there was much in that comedy which baffled or eluded the vulgar comprehension; but the principal defects of the play cannot correctly be placed in this category, nor can its failure be plausibly deduced from this cause.
6. One of the methods by which a juryman signified the vote for condemnation was the tracing of a line horizontally across a waxed tablet; the other involved the use of a pebble, which was dropped in one or the other of two urns, that of conviction or that of acquittal.
7. The wood of the fig-tree, when burned, gives off the most acrid smoke, and thus is eminently suited to the proud sourness of Philocleon's temper.
8. "To quarrel over the shade of an ass" meant to dispute about next to nothing. The ancients explained the origin of this idiom by an aetiological tale of a traveller who had hired an ass and, being observed by the owner resting in the shade which the animal cast, was sued by that imaginative and avaricious individual on the ground that it had been the ass and not its shade that the traveller had hired.
9. The goddess here invoked is Artemis.
10. "The crackling of fig-leaves in the fire" meant much ado about nothing.
11. "The parley and the rue" signified the mere beginnings of anything.
12. The name Hippias contains the stem of the Greek word for horse (*hippos*). This remark and those of Bdelycleon in the preceding speech suggest that the word tyranny was in Aristophanes' day used as frequently and as loosely as fascism and communism are today.

13. A pun on the Greek word *choiros*, which means both "sow" and "female genitalia." Aristophanes had made extensive use of this ambiguous word in one of the best scenes in *The Acharnians* (765-817).

14. Those in the ancient world who were too poor to afford a purse were wont to carry small coins in their mouths.

15. When the jurymen had been deeply moved by the pleading of the accused and had decided on acquittal, they commanded him to descend from the rostrum; apparently this was by no means an infallible indication of acquittal, and the accused had the right to finish his speech.

16. Philocleon is comparing the thick and shaggy cloth of the pelisse to the intestines of an ox, which have a crinkly appearance.

17. The mention of the salary gives away the fact that it was merely as a common soldier that Philocleon had been sent to Paros.

18. In all three cases where Philocleon finishes the line he adds something unpleasantly appropriate to the guest who is supposed to have led off the song.

19. A pun on the Greek words *triarchoi*, "three kings" and *triorchoi*, "having three testicles," i.e., endowed with 50% more sexuality than normal.

V  
PEACE

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

TRYGAEUS  
TWO SERVANTS OF TRYGAEUS  
DAUGHTERS OF TRYGAEUS  
HERMES  
WAR  
TUMULT  
HIEROCLES, *a Soothsayer*  
AN ARMOURER  
A SICKLE-MAKER  
A CREST-MAKER  
SON OF LAMACHUS  
SON OF CLEONYMUS  
CHORUS OF HUSBANDMEN

## INTRODUCTION

AT THE Great Dionysia of 421 Aristophanes ushered in the best period of his extant work with *Peace*, which won the second prize, the first going to *The Flatterers* of Eupolis. The verdict of the audience, if just, is to be construed entirely as testimony to the superlative excellence of the older dramatist's production, and in no sense as a slur on what is very nearly the most delightful of the eleven comedies of Aristophanes that have come down to us. The play exhibits signs of having been hastily composed, but the infectious gaiety and spontaneous warmth with which it is so liberally endowed are attributable less to an impromptu composition than to the sentiments which the events and the hopes of the time had inspired in the poet's heart.

The war of the Athenians with the Peloponnesians had begun as long ago as 431, and a decade of fighting had sorely afflicted the inhabitants of the rural districts of Attica. The frequent invasions of the Lacedæmonians had compelled them to relinquish their ancestral farms and their beloved rustic life and to find such habitation as they could in the congested city, from whose walls they might tearfully observe the destruction of their houses and the devastation of their fields. But a powerful Peace Party, which they and their urban sympathizers might have organized, was forestalled of its effectiveness by the chicanery of the demagogues and the success of the navy. The repeated proposals of Sparta for a cessation of hostilities were haughtily rejected, and it was only in 422, when Athens had experienced two years of military reverses and Cleon had been killed in battle, that a definitely pacifistic policy was actively adopted. Sparta likewise, in spite of her recent successes, was known to be just as weary of the war as her opponent, and there was thus, in the early months of 421, every reason to anticipate a favourable issue of the negotiations that had been opened in the latter part of the previous year.

The second of the three peace-comedies was thus composed in an atmosphere radically different from that which attended the production of *The Acharnians* four years earlier, and the two plays show little similarity in their emotional colouring. The later comedy has little of satire in it; its

author is too happy for that, and what he has written is at once a hymn of thanksgiving, a dance of joy, and a bright revery of future felicity.

The opening of the play presents us with two slaves of Trygaeus, who are breathlessly kneading cakes of excrement and feeding them to a dung-beetle which their master is keeping in his stable. Like Dicaeopolis in *The Acharnians*, he has despaired of obtaining peace through ordinary legislative channels and has resolved to do something about it himself, but his sentiments are more panhellenic and his project more fantastic than those of the earlier pacifist, for he has resolved to go to none other than Zeus himself in order to put an end to the war. A previous effort to climb to the divine residence on ladders has netted him nothing more than a broken head, and he now proposes to fly to heaven on the back of his malodorous and economical Pegasus.

The journey is negotiated with complete success, and at the door of the palace of Zeus he is rudely accosted by Hermes, from whom, after an easy propitiation, he learns of the disappointing state of affairs which the war has brought about in the celestial regions. The stupidities of the Greeks have utterly exhausted the patience of the gods, and they have moved away, as far away as possible, leaving their mortal subjects to the mercy of War and his slave Tumult. The first act of the new master of Hellenic affairs has been to cast Peace into a deep pit and then to heap numerous stones on her. He has then procured a huge mortar, in which he intends to grind up the cities of Greece into a wretched paste. No sooner has Hermes reported this than the villain himself appears and begins to realize his gruesome intentions; the cities, represented by their most noted products, are one by one tossed into the mortar, but the malignant god lacks a pestle and experiences difficulties in obtaining one. Both Sparta and Athens have lost theirs; Cleon and Brasidas are dead now. Thus the horrible fate of Greece is momentarily averted and War departs to make his own pestle.

Trygaeus, emerging from his hiding-place, realizes that he must liberate Peace immediately or else relinquish all hope of ever seeing her again, and he therefore summons to his aid a number of labourers and farmers from all parts of Greece. The Chorus now enters, highly and, under the circumstances, perilously elated at the prospect of putting an end to the war. When quiet has finally been restored and the objections of Hermes have melted away at the promise of future glory and sacrifices, the difficult task of extricating Peace is undertaken, with great enthusiasm and greater inefficiency. The difficulties are delightfully Hellenic; the Boeotians are only pretending; Lamachus is in the way; the Argives laugh at the others while they profit from their troubles; the Megarians are trying hard, but are too undernourished to be of much use; some of the Greeks are pulling

one way and some another; the Laconians do their part, along with the Athenians, but even here it is only the farmers that are doing any real work. Through *their* exertions Peace is at last hauled out of the pit, along with Opora and Theoria, and Trygaeus starts on his return journey to the earth, taking Opora to his marriage-bed and Theoria to the Senate. The Chorus now delivers the parabasis.

The anapests recite Aristophanes' claims to distinction as a comic poet. The ode begs the Muse to bring peace and attacks Carcinus and his sons as tragic poets. The antode extends this attack to others. The parabasis is incomplete, lacking the epirrhemes. Nor are these the only evidences of hurried writing, for in the anapests four lines are used verbatim from the parabasis of *The Wasps*, and the material generally is not new. More significant is the fact that indications of hasty composition are found nowhere else in the play, which would suggest that the parabases of most of the comedies were written last, after all the rest had been finished, and were thus regarded by the poet as something separate and independent.

At the conclusion of the parabasis Trygaeus comes limping in with Opora and Theoria, and almost immediately sets about preparing to enjoy the peace which he has obtained. Opora is taken into his house to be bathed and dressed for the wedding, Theoria is presented to the Senate, and a gala feast is begun. While Trygaeus and his servant are roasting the meat a belligerent soothsayer appears, mouthing oracles about the impossibility of ending the war (these were sounder prophecies than Aristophanes then realized), and trying by persuasion and by fraud to get a share of the feast. He is followed by a man who has been economically hard pressed by the war, a sickle-maker, who gratefully presents Trygaeus with a large number of his products. Right on his heels comes a large group of the least pitiable victims of the peace, those most detestable of war-time profiteers, the manufacturers of armaments, whose spokesman strives vainly to realize a little something out of the large and unmarketable stocks which the sudden cessation of hostilities has left on their hands. Trygaeus rejects their offers with no less alacrity than scorn, and after the sons of Lamachus and Cleonymus have sung snatches of songs suited to their fathers' characters, Opora is brought out, and the comedy ends with the singing of the *Hymen Hymenaeus*.

A bare and compendious outline of its plot inevitably and always preserves the frame and omits the picture of an Aristophanic comedy, but such a presentation does a greater injustice to *Peace* than to any of the other plays, for its charm and its excellence reside less in the plot and its incidents than in the quality of their treatment and the freshness of their atmosphere. From this point of view *Peace* is at once a development out of



the youthful exuberance of *The Acharnians* and a prelude to the mature perfection of *The Birds*. When he composed it the poet was exulting in the fine first flush of a happiness that he was never again to experience, and, confidently anticipating a return to the pristine joys of rural life, he produced a comedy that is saturated with sunshine and redolent of the country-side. Trygaeus is not Dicaeopolis, and Aristophanes would not again so thoroughly speak his mind through the mouth of one of his characters; but neither *The Acharnians* nor any other play as a whole contains so full a measure of its author's heart as does *Peace*. Where Aristophanes is happiest, there is he most candid also, and it is thus particularly gratifying to observe the truth of the further proposition that where he is happiest, there is he bawdiest also. That the scholars of the nineteenth century should have been unable or unwilling to understand what *Peace* so plainly declares about the most delightful side of Aristophanes' nature is less surprising than revealing.

## PEACE

(SCENE:—*Behind the Orchestra on the right the farmhouse of TRYGAEUS, in the centre the mouth of a cave closed up with huge boulders, on the left the palace of ZEUS. In front of the farmhouse is a stable, the door of which is closed. Two of TRYGAEUS' slaves are seen in front of the stable, one of them kneading cakes of dung, the other taking the finished cakes and throwing them into the stable.*)

FIRST SERVANT

QUICK, quick, bring the dung-beetle his cake.

SECOND SERVANT

There it is. Give it to him, and may it kill him! And may he never eat a better.

FIRST SERVANT

Now give him this other one kneaded up with ass's dung.

SECOND SERVANT

There! I've done that too. And where's what you gave him just now? Surely he can't have devoured it yet!

FIRST SERVANT

Indeed he has; he snatched it, rolled it between his feet and bolted it. Come, hurry up, knead up a lot and knead them stiffly.

SECOND SERVANT

Oh, scavengers, help me in the name of the gods, if you do not wish to see me fall down choked.

FIRST SERVANT

Come, come, another made from the stool of a fairy's favourite. That will be to the beetle's taste; he likes it well ground.

## SECOND SERVANT

There! I am free at least from suspicion; none will accuse me of tasting what I mix.

## FIRST SERVANT

Faugh! come, now another! keep on mixing with all your might.

## SECOND SERVANT

By god, no. I can stand this awful cesspool stench no longer.

## FIRST SERVANT

I shall bring you the whole ill-smelling gear.

## SECOND SERVANT

Pitch it down the sewer sooner, and yourself with it. (*To the AUDIENCE*) Maybe, one of you can tell me where I can buy a stopped-up nose, for there is no work more disgusting than to mix food for a dung-beetle and to carry it to him. A pig or a dog will at least pounce upon our excrement without more ado, but this foul wretch affects the disdainful, the spoilt mistress, and won't eat unless I offer him a cake that has been kneaded for an entire day. . . . But let us open the door a bit ajar without his seeing it. Has he done eating? Come, pluck up courage, cram yourself till you burst! The cursed creature! It wallows in its food! It grips it between its claws like a wrestler clutching his opponent, and with head and feet together rolls up its paste like a rope-maker twisting a hawser. What an indecent, stinking, gluttonous beast! I don't know what angry god let this monster loose upon us, but of a certainty it was neither Aphrodité nor the Graces.

## FIRST SERVANT

Who was it then?

## SECOND SERVANT

No doubt Zeus, the God of the Thundercrap.<sup>1</sup>

## FIRST SERVANT

But perhaps some spectator, some beardless youth, who thinks himself a sage, will say, "What is this? What does the beetle mean?" And then an Ionian, sitting next him, will add, "I think it's an allusion to Cleon, who so shamelessly feeds on filth all by himself."—But now I'm going indoors to fetch the beetle a drink.

## SECOND SERVANT

As for me, I will explain the matter to you all, children, youths, grown-ups and old men, aye, even to the decrepit dotards. My master is mad,

not as you are, but with another sort of madness, quite a new kind. The livelong day he looks open-mouthed towards heaven and never stops addressing Zeus. "Ah! Zeus," he cries, "what are thy intentions? Lay aside thy besom; do not sweep Greece away!" Ah! Hush, hush! I think I hear his voice!

TRYGAEUS (*from within*)

Oh! Zeus, what art thou going to do for our people? Dost thou not see this, that our cities will soon be but empty husks?

SECOND SERVANT

As I told you, that is his form of madness. There you have a sample of his follies. When his trouble first began to seize him, he said to himself, "By what means could I go straight to Zeus?" Then he made himself very slender little ladders and so clambered up towards heaven; but he soon came hurtling down again and broke his head. Yesterday, to our misfortune, he went out and brought us back this thoroughbred, but from where I know not, this great beetle, whose groom he has forced me to become. He himself caresses it as though it were a horse, saying, "Oh! my little Pegasus, my noble aerial steed, may your wings soon bear me straight to Zeus!" But what is my master doing? I must stoop down to look through this hole. Oh! great gods! Here! neighbours, run here quick! here is my master flying off mounted on his beetle as if on horseback.

(*The Machine brings in TRYGAEUS astride an enormous figure of a dung-beetle with wings spread.*)

TRYGAEUS (*intoning*)

Gently, gently, go easy, beetle; don't start off so proudly, or trust at first too greatly to your powers; wait till you have sweated, till the beating of your wings shall make your limb joints supple. Above all things, don't let off some foul smell. I adjure you; else I would rather have you stay right in the stable.

SECOND SERVANT (*intoning*)

Poor master! Is he crazy?

TRYGAEUS (*intoning*)

Silence! silence!

SECOND SERVANT (*intoning*)

But why start up into the air on chance?

TRYGAEUS (*intoning*)

'Tis for the weal of all the Greeks; I am attempting a daring and novel feat.

SECOND SERVANT (*intoning*)

But what is your purpose? What useless folly!

TRYGAEUS (*intoning*)

No words of ill omen! Give vent to joy and command all men to keep silence, to close down their drains and privies with new tiles and to cork up their own arses.

FIRST SERVANT (*speaking*)

No, I shall not be silent, unless you tell me where you are going.

TRYGAEUS

Why, where am I likely to be going across the sky, if it be not to visit Zeus?

FIRST SERVANT

For what purpose?

TRYGAEUS

I want to ask him what he reckons to do for all the Greeks.

SECOND SERVANT

And if he doesn't tell you?

TRYGAEUS

I shall pursue him at law as a traitor who sells Greece to the Medes.

SECOND SERVANT

Death seize me, if I let you go.

TRYGAEUS

It is absolutely necessary.

SECOND SERVANT (*loudly*)

Alas! alas! dear little girls, your father is deserting you secretly to go to heaven. Ah! poor orphans, entreat him, beseech him.

(*The little daughters of TRYGAEUS come out.*)

LITTLE DAUGHTER (*singing*)

Father! father! what is this I hear? Is it true? What! you would leave me, you would vanish into the sky, you would go to the crows? <sup>2</sup> Impossible! Answer, father, if you love me.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Yes, I am going. You hurt me too sorely, my daughters, when you ask me for bread, calling me your daddy, and there is not the ghost

of an obolus in the house; if I succeed and come back, you will have a barley loaf every morning—and a punch in the eye for sauce!

LITTLE DAUGHTER

But how will you make the journey? There's no ship that will take you there.

TRYGAEUS

No, but this winged steed will.

LITTLE DAUGHTER

But what an idea, papa, to harness a beetle, to fly to the gods on.

TRYGAEUS

We see from Aesop's fables that they alone can fly to the abode of the Immortals.<sup>3</sup>

LITTLE DAUGHTER

Father, father, that's a tale nobody can believe! that such a smelly creature can have gone to the gods.

TRYGAEUS

It went to have vengeance on the eagle and break its eggs.

LITTLE DAUGHTER

Why not saddle Pegasus? you would have a more tragic appearance in the eyes of the gods.

TRYGAEUS

Eh! don't you see, little fool, that then twice the food would be wanted? Whereas my beetle devours again as filth what I have eaten myself.

LITTLE DAUGHTER

And if it fell into the watery depths of the sea, could it escape with its wings?

TRYGAEUS (*exposing himself*)

I am fitted with a rudder in case of need, and my Naxos beetle will serve me as a boat.

LITTLE DAUGHTER

And what harbour will you put in at?

TRYGAEUS

Why, is there not the harbour of Cantharus at the Piraeus?

## LITTLE DAUGHTER

Take care not to knock against anything and so fall off into space; once a cripple, you would be a fit subject for Euripides, who would put you into a tragedy.<sup>4</sup>

TRYGAEUS (*as the Machine hoists him higher*)

I'll see to it. Good-bye! (*To the Athenians*) You, for love of whom I brave these dangers, do ye neither fart nor crap for the space of three days, for, if, while cleaving the air, my steed should scent anything, he wouldiling me head foremost from the summit of my hopes.

(*Intoning*)

Now come, my Pegasus, get a-going with up-pricked ears and make your golden bridle resound gaily. Eh! what are you doing? What are you up to? Do you turn your nose towards the cesspools? Come, pluck up a spirit; rush upwards from the earth, stretch out your speedy wings and make straight for the palace of Zeus; for once give up foraging in your daily food.—Hi! you down there, what are you after now? Oh! my god! it's a man taking a crap in the Piraeus, close to the warehouses. But is it my death you seek then, my death? Will you not bury that right away and pile a great heap of earth upon it and plant wild thyme therein and pour perfumes on it? If I were to fall from up here and misfortune happened to me, the town of Chios would owe a fine of five talents for my death, all because of your damned arse.

(*Speaking*)

Alas! how frightened I am! oh! I have no heart for jests. Ah! machinist, take great care of me. There is already a wind whirling round my navel; take great care or, from sheer fright, I shall form food for my beetle. . . . But I think I am no longer far from the gods; aye, that is the dwelling of Zeus, I perceive. (*The beetle descends and comes to a halt in front of the house of Zeus. TRYGAEUS dismounts and knocks at the door.*) Hullo! Hi! where is the doorkeeper? Will no one open?

HERMES (*from within*)

I think I can sniff a man. (*Opening the door*) Why, what plague is this?

TRYGAEUS

A horse-beetle.

HERMES

Oh! impudent, shameless rascal! oh! scoundrel! triple scoundrel! the greatest scoundrel in the world! how did you come here? Oh! scoundrel of all scoundrels! your name? Reply.

TRYGAEUS

Triple scoundrel.

HERMES

Your country?

TRYGAEUS

Triple scoundrel.

HERMES

Your father?

TRYGAEUS

My father? Triple scoundrel.

HERMES

By the Earth, you shall die, unless you tell me your name.

TRYGAEUS

I am Trygaeus of the Athmonian deme, a good vine-dresser, little addicted to quibbling and not at all an informer.

HERMES

Why do you come?

TRYGAEUS

I come to bring you this meat.

HERMES (*changing his tone*)

Ah! my good friend, did you have a good journey?

TRYGAEUS

Glutton, be off! I no longer seem a triple scoundrel to you. Come, call Zeus.

HERMES

Ah! ah! you are a long way yet from reaching the gods, for they moved yesterday.

TRYGAEUS

To what part of the earth?

HERMES

Eh! of the earth, did you say?

TRYGAEUS

In short, where are they then?



HERMES

Very far, very far, right at the furthest end of the dome of heaven.

TRYGAEUS

But why have they left you all alone here?

HERMES

I am watching what remains of the furniture, the little pots and pans, the bits of chairs and tables, and odd wine-jars.

TRYGAEUS

And why have the gods moved away?

HERMES

Because of their wrath against the Greeks. They have located War in the house they occupied themselves and have given him full power to do with you exactly as he pleases; then they went as high up as ever they could, so as to see no more of your fights and to hear no more of your prayers.

TRYGAEUS

What reason have they for treating us so?

HERMES

Because they have afforded you an opportunity for peace more than once, but you have always preferred war. If the Laconians got the very slightest advantage, they would exclaim, "By the Twin Brethren! the Athenians shall smart for this." If, on the contrary, the latter triumphed and the Laconians came with peace proposals, you would say, "By Demeter, they want to deceive us. No, by Zeus, we will not hear a word; they will always be coming as long as we hold Pylos."

TRYGAEUS

Yes, that is quite the style our folk do talk in.

HERMES

So that I don't know whether you will ever see Peace again.

TRYGAEUS

Why, where has she gone to then?

HERMES

War has cast her into a deep pit.

TRYGAEUS

Where?

HERMES

Down there, at the very bottom. And you see what heaps of stones he has piled over the top, so that you should never pull her out again.

TRYGAEUS

Tell me, what is War preparing against us?

HERMES

All I know is that last evening he brought along a huge mortar.

TRYGAEUS

And what is he going to do with his mortar?

HERMES

He wants to pound up all the cities of Greece in it. . . . But I must say good-bye, for I think he is coming out; what an uproar he is making!  
(*He departs in haste.*)

TRYGAEUS

Ah! great gods let us seek safety; I think I already hear the noise of this fearful war mortar. (*He hides.*)

WAR (*enters, carrying a huge mortar*)

Oh! mortals, mortals, wretched mortals, how your jaws will snap!

TRYGAEUS

Oh! divine Apollo! what a prodigious big mortar! Oh, what misery the very sight of War causes me! This then is the foe from whom I fly, who is so cruel, so formidable, so stalwart, so solid on his legs!

WAR

Oh! Prasidae! thrice wretched, five times, aye, a thousand times wretched! for thou shalt be destroyed this day.

(*He throws some locks into the mortar.*)

TRYGAEUS (*to the audience*)

This, gentlemen, does not concern *us* over much; it's only so much the worse for the Laconians.

WAR

Oh! Megara! Megara! how utterly are you going to be ground up! what fine mincemeat are you to be made into!

(*He throws in some garlic.*)

TRYGAEUS (*aside*)

Alas! alas! what bitter tears there will be among the Megarians!

WAR (*throwing in some cheese*)

Oh, Sicily! you too must perish! Your wretched towns shall be grated like this cheese. Now let us pour some Attic honey into the mortar.

(*He does so.*)

TRYGÆUS (*aside*)

Oh! I beseech you! use some other honey; this kind is worth four obols; be careful, oh! be careful of our Attic honey.

WAR

Hi! Tumult, you slave there!

TUMULT

What do you want?

WAR

Out upon you! Standing there with folded arms! Take this cuff on the head for your pains.

TUMULT

Oh! how it stings! Master, have you got garlic in your fist, I wonder?

WAR

Run and fetch me a pestle.

TUMULT

But we haven't got one; it was only yesterday we moved.

WAR

Go and fetch me one from Athens, and hurry, hurry!

TUMULT

I'll hurry; if I return without one, I shall have no cause for laughing.  
(*He runs off*)

TRYGÆUS (*to the audience*)

Ah! what is to become of us, wretched mortals that we are? See the danger that threatens if he returns with the pestle, for War will quietly amuse himself with pounding all the towns of Hellas to pieces. Ah! Bacchus! cause this herald of evil to perish on his road!

WAR (*to the returning TUMULT*)

Well?

TUMULT

Well, what?

## WAR

You have brought back nothing?

## TUMULT

Alas! the Athenians have lost their pestle—the tanner, who ground Greece to powder.

## TRYGÆUS

Oh! Athené, venerable mistress! it is well for our city he is dead, and before he could serve us with *this* hash.

## WAR

Then go and seek one at Sparta and have done with it!

## TUMULT

Aye, aye, master!

(*He runs off*)

WAR (*shouting after him*)

Be back as quick as ever you can.

TRYGÆUS (*to the audience*)

What is going to happen, friends? This is the critical hour. Ah! if there is some initiate of Samothrace among you, this is surely the moment to wish this messenger some accident—some sprain or strain.

TUMULT (*returning*)

Alas! alas! thrice again, alas!

## WAR

What is it? Again you come back without it?

## TUMULT

The Spartans too have lost their pestle.

## WAR

How, varlet?

## TUMULT

They had lent it to their allies in Thrace, who have lost it for them.

## TRYGÆUS

Long life to you, Thracians! My hopes revive, pluck up courage, mortals!

## WAR

Take all this stuff; I am going in to make a pestle for myself.

*(He goes in, followed by TUMULT.)*

TRYGAEUS *(coming out of his hiding-place)*

Now is the time to sing as Datis did, as he masturbated at high noon, "Oh pleasure! oh enjoyment! oh delights!" Now, oh Greeks! is the moment when freed of quarrels and fighting, we should rescue sweet Peace and draw her out of this pit, before some other pestle prevents us. Come, labourers, merchants, workmen, artisans, strangers, whether you be domiciled or not, islanders, come here, Greeks of all countries, come hurrying here with picks and levers and ropes! This is the moment to drain a cup in honour of the Good Genius.

*(The CHORUS enters; it consists of labourers and farmers from various Greek states.)*

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come hither all! quick, quick, hasten to the rescue! All peoples of Greece, now is the time or never, for you to help each other. You see yourselves freed from battles and all their horrors of bloodshed. The day hateful to Lamachus has come. (To TRYGAEUS) Come then, what must be done? Give your orders, direct us, for I swear to work this day without ceasing, until with the help of our levers and our engines we have drawn back into light the greatest of all goddesses, her to whom the olive is so dear.

## TRYGAEUS

Silence! if War should hear your shouts of joy he would bound forth from his retreat in fury.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Such a decree overwhelms us with joy; how different to the edict, which bade us muster with provisions for three days.

## TRYGAEUS

Let us beware lest the cursed Cerberus prevent us even from the nethermost hell from delivering the goddess by his furious howling, just as he did when on earth.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Once we have hold of her, none in the world will be able to take her from us. Huzza! huzza!

TRYGAEUS

You will work my death if you don't subdue your shouts. War will come running out and trample everything beneath his feet.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Well then! *Let* him confound, let him trample, let him overturn everything! We cannot help giving vent to our joy.

TRYGAEUS

Oh! cruel fate! My friends! in the name of the gods, what possesses you? Your dancing will wreck the success of a fine undertaking.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It's not I who want to dance; it's my legs that bound with delight.

TRYGAEUS

Enough, please, cease your gambols.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There! That's all.

TRYGAEUS

You say so, and nevertheless you go on.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yet one more figure and it's done.

TRYGAEUS

Well, just this one; then you must dance no more.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No, no more dancing, if we can help you.

TRYGAEUS

But look, you are not stopping even now.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

By Zeus, I am only throwing up my right leg, that's all.

TRYGAEUS

Come, I grant you that, but pray, annoy me no further.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah! the left leg too will have its fling; well, that's its right. I am so happy, so delighted at not having to carry my buckler any more. I fart for joy and I laugh more than if I had cast my old age, as a serpent does its skin.

TRYGAEUS

No, it's not time for joy yet, for you are not sure of success. But when you have got the goddess, then rejoice, shout and laugh; thenceforward you will be able to sail or stay at home, to make love or sleep, to attend festivals and processions, to play at cottabos, live like true Sybarites and to shout, Io, io!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ah! God grant we may see the blessed day. I have suffered so much; have so oft slept with Phormio on hard beds. You will no longer find me a bitter and angry judge . . .

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Nor, naturally, hard in your ways, as heretofore.

CHORUS (*singing*)

. . . but turned indulgent and grown younger by twenty years through happiness. We have been killing ourselves long enough, tiring ourselves out with going to the Lyceum and returning laden with spear and buckler.—But what can we do to please you? Come, speak; for 'tis a good Fate that has named you our leader.

TRYGAEUS

How shall we set about removing these stones?

HERMES (*who has just returned*)

Rash reprobate, what do you propose doing?

TRYGAEUS

Nothing bad, as Cillicon said.

HERMES

You are undone, you wretch.

TRYGAEUS

Yes, if the lot had to decide my life, for Hermes would know how to turn the chance.

HERMES

You are lost, you are dead.

TRYGAEUS

On what day?

HERMES

This instant.

TRYGAEUS

But I have not provided myself with flour and cheese yet <sup>6</sup> to start for death.

HERMES

You *are* kneaded and ground already, I tell you.

TRYGAEUS

Hah! I have not yet tasted that gentle pleasure.

HERMES

Don't you know that Zeus has decreed death for him who is caught exhuming Peace?

TRYGAEUS

What! must I really and truly die?

HERMES

You must.

TRYGAEUS

Well then, lend me three drachmae to buy a young pig; I wish to have myself initiated before I die.<sup>7</sup>

HERMES

Oh! Zeus, the Thunderer!

TRYGAEUS

I adjure you in the name of the gods, master, don't report us!

HERMES

I may not, I cannot keep silent.

TRYGAEUS

In the name of the meats which I brought you so good-naturedly.

HERMES

Why, wretched man, Zeus will annihilate me, if I do not shout out at the top of my voice, to inform him what you are plotting.

TRYGAEUS

Oh, no! don't shout, I beg you, dear little Hermes. . . . And what are you doing, comrades? You stand there as though you were stocks and stones. Wretched men, speak, entreat him at once; otherwise he will be shouting.



CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! mighty Hermes! do not do it; no, do not do it! If ever you have eaten some young pig, sacrificed by us on your altars, with pleasure, may this offering not be without value in your sight to-day.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Do you not hear them wheedling you, mighty god?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Be not pitiless toward our prayers; permit us to deliver the goddess. Oh! the most human, the most generous of the gods, be favourable toward is, if it be true that you detest the haughty crests and proud brows of Pisander; we shall never cease, oh master, offering you sacred victims and solemn prayers.

TRYGAEUS

Have mercy, mercy, let yourself be touched by their words; never was your worship so dear to them as to-day. (*Aside*) Really they are the greatest thieves that ever were. (*To HERMES*) And I shall reveal to you a great and terrible plot that is being hatched against the gods.

HERMES

Hah! speak and perchance I shall let myself be softened.

TRYGAEUS

Know then, that the Moon and that infamous Sun are plotting against you, and want to deliver Greece into the hands of the barbarians.

HERMES

What for?

TRYGAEUS

Because it is to you that we sacrifice, whereas the barbarians worship them; hence they would like to see you destroyed, that they alone might receive the offerings.

HERMES

Is it then for this reason that these untrustworthy charioteers have for so long been defrauding us, one of them robbing us of daylight and the other nibbling away at the other's disk?

TRYGAEUS

Yes, certainly. So therefore, Hermes, my friend, help us with your whole heart to find and deliver the captive and we will celebrate the great Panathenaea in your honour as well as all the festivals of the other gods; for Hermes shall be the Mysteries, the Dipolia, the Adonia; everywhere

the towns, freed from their miseries, will sacrifice to Hermes the Liberator; you will be loaded with benefits of every kind, and to start with, I offer you this cup for libations as your first present.

HERMES

Ah! how golden cups do influence me! Come, friends, get to work. To the pit quickly, pick in hand, and drag away the stones.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We go, but you, cleverest of all the gods, supervise our labours; tell us, good workman as you are, what we must do; we shall obey your orders with alacrity.

*(They begin to lift the stones.)*

TRYGAEUS

Quick, reach me your cup, and let us preface our work by addressing prayers to the gods.

HERMES

Libation! Libation! Silence! Silence! Let us offer our libations and our prayers, so that this day may begin an era of unalloyed happiness for Greece and that he who has bravely pulled at the rope with us may never resume his buckler.

TRYGAEUS

Aye, may we pass our lives in peace, caressing our mistresses and poking the fire.

HERMES

May he who would prefer the war, oh Dionysus . . .

TRYGAEUS

Be ever drawing barbed arrows out of his elbows.

HERMES

If there be a citizen, greedy for military rank and honours, who refuses, oh, divine Peace! to restore you to daylight . . .

TRYGAEUS

May he behave as cowardly as Cleonymus on the battlefield.

HERMES

If a lance-maker or a dealer in shields desires war for the sake of better trade . . .

TRYGAEUS

May he be taken by pirates and eat nothing but barley.

HERMES

If some ambitious man does not help us, because he wants to become a General, or if a slave is plotting to pass over to the enemy . . .

TRYGAEUS

Let his limbs be broken on the wheel, may he be beaten to death with rods!

HERMES

As for us, may Fortune favour us! Io! Paean, Io!

TRYGAEUS

Don't say Paean, but simply, Io.

HERMES

Very well, then! Io! Io! I'll simply say, Io!

TRYGAEUS

To Hermes, the Graces, the Horae, Aphrodité, Eros!

HERMES

But not to Ares.

TRYGAEUS

No.

HERMES

Nor to Enyalios.

TRYGAEUS

No.

*(The stones have been removed and a rope attached to the cover of the pit. The indented portions of the following scene are a sort of chanty.)*

HERMES

Come, all strain at the ropes to tear off the cover. Pull!

CHORUS

Heave away, heave, heave, oh!

HERMES

Come, pull harder, harder.

CHORUS

Heave away, heave, heave, oh!

HERMES

Still harder, harder still.

## CHORUS

Heave away, heave! Heave away, heave, heave, oh!

## TRYGAEUS

Come, come, there is no working together. Come! all pull at the same instant! you Boeotians are only pretending. Beware!

## HERMES

Come, heave away, heave!

## TRYGAEUS

Heave away, heave oh!

## CHORUS

Hi! you two pull as well.

## TRYGAEUS

Why, I am pulling, I am hanging on to the rope and straining till I am almost off my feet; I am working with all my might.

## CHORUS

Why does not the work advance then?

## TRYGAEUS

Lamachus, this is terrible! You are in the way, sitting there. We have no use for your Medusa's head, friend. But wait, the Argives have not pulled the least bit; they have done nothing but laugh at us for our pains while they were getting gain with both hands.

## HERMES

Ah! my dear sir, the Laconians at all events pull with vigour.

## TRYGAEUS

But look! only those among them who generally hold the plough-tail show any zeal, while the armourers impede them in their efforts.

## HERMES

And the Megarians too are doing nothing, yet look how they are pulling and showing their teeth like famished curs.

## TRYGAEUS

The poor wretches are dying of hunger I suppose.

## HERMES

This won't do, friends. Come! all together! Everyone to the work and with a good heart for the business.

CHORUS

Heave away, heave!

HERMES

Harder!

CHORUS

Heave away, heave!

HERMES

Come on then, by heaven.

CHORUS

We are moving it a little.

TRYGAEUS

Isn't it terrible and stupid! some pull one way and others another.  
You Argives there, beware of a thrashing!

HERMES

Come, put your strength into it.

TRYGAEUS

Heave away, heave!

CHORUS

There are many ill-disposed folk among us.

TRYGAEUS

Do you at least, who long for peace, pull heartily.

CHORUS

But there are some who prevent us.

HERMES

Off to the Devil with you, Megarians! The goddess hates you. She  
recollects that you were the first to rub her the wrong way. Athenians,  
you are not well placed for pulling. There you are too busy with law-suits;  
if you really want to free the goddess, get down a little towards the sea.<sup>s</sup>

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, friends, none but husbandmen on the rope.

HERMES

Ah! that will do ever so much better.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

He says the thing is going well. Come, all of you, together and with a will.

## TRYGAEUS

It's the husbandmen who are doing all the work.

## CHORUS

Come then, come, and all together!

## HERMES

Hah! hah! at last there is some unanimity in the work.

## CHORUS

Don't let us give up, let us redouble our efforts.

## HERMES

There! now we have it!

## CHORUS

Come then, all together! Heave away, heave! Heave away, heave! Heave away, heave! Heave away, heave! Heave away, heave! All together!

(*PEACE is drawn out of the pit. With her come OPORA and THEORIA.*)

## TRYGAEUS

Oh! venerated goddess, who givest us our grapes, where am I to find the ten-thousand-gallon words wherewith to greet thee? I have none such at home. Oh! hail to thee, Opora, and thee, Theoria! How beautiful is thy face! How sweet thy breath! What gentle fragrance comes from thy bosom, gentle as freedom from military duty, as the most dainty perfumes!

## HERMES

Is it then a smell like a soldier's knapsack?

## TRYGAEUS

Oh! hateful soldier! your hideous satchel makes me sick! it stinks like the belching of onions, whereas this lovable deity has the odour of sweet fruits, of festivals, of the Dionysia, of the harmony of flutes, of the tragic poets, of the verses of Sophocles, of the phrases of Euripides . . .

## HERMES

That's a foul calumny, you wretch! She detests that framer of subtleties and quibbles.

TRYGAEUS (*ignoring this*)

. . . of ivy, of straining-bags for wine, of bleating ewes, of provision-laden women hastening to the kitchen, of the tipsy servant wench, of the upturned wine-jar, and of a whole heap of other good things.

HERMES

Then look how the reconciled towns chat pleasantly together, how they laugh . . .

TRYGAEUS

And yet they are all cruelly mishandled; their wounds are bleeding still.

HERMES

But let us also scan the mien of the spectators; we shall thus find out the trade of each.

TRYGAEUS

Good god!

HERMES

Look at that poor crest-maker, tearing at his hair . . .

TRYGAEUS

. . . and at that pike-maker, who has just farted in yon sword-cutler's face.

HERMES

And do you see with what pleasure this sickle-maker . . .

TRYGAEUS

. . . is thumbing his nose at the spear-maker?

HERMES

Now tell the husbandmen to be off.

TRYGAEUS

Listen, good folk! Let the husbandmen take their farming tools and return to their fields as quickly as possible, but without either sword, spear or javelin. All is as quiet as if Peace had been reigning for a century. Come, let everyone go and till the earth, singing the Paean.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to PEACE*)

Oh, thou, whom men of standing desired and who art good to husbandmen, I have gazed upon thee with delight; and now I go to greet my vines, to caress after so long an absence the fig trees I planted in my youth.

## TRYGÆUS

Friends, let us first adore the goddess, who has delivered us from crests and Gorgons; then let us hurry to our farms, having first bought a nice little piece of salt fish to eat in the fields.

## HERMES

By Posidon! what a fine crew they make and dense as the crust of a cake; they are as nimble as guests on their way to a feast.

## TRYGÆUS

See, how their iron spades glitter and how beautifully their three-pronged mattocks glisten in the sun! How regularly they align the plants! I also burn to go into the country and to turn over the earth I have so long neglected.—Friends, do you remember the happy life that Peace afforded us formerly; can you recall the splendid baskets of figs, both fresh and dried, the myrtles, the sweet wine, the violets blooming near the spring, and the olives, for which we have wept so much? Worship, adore the goddess for restoring you so many blessings.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Hail! hail! thou beloved divinity! thy return overwhelms us with joy. When far from thee, my ardent wish to see my fields again made me pine with regret. From thee came all blessings. Oh! much desired Peace! thou art the sole support of those who spend their lives tilling the earth. Under thy rule we had a thousand delicious enjoyments at our beck; thou wert the husbandman's wheaten cake and his safeguard. So that our vineyards, our young fig-tree woods and all our plantations hail thee with delight and smile at thy coming.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But where was she then, I wonder, all the long time she spent away from us? Hermes, thou benevolent god, tell us!

## HERMES

Wise husbandmen, hearken to my words, if you want to know why she was lost to you. The start of our misfortunes was the exile of Phidias; Pericles feared he might share his ill-luck, he mistrusted your peevish nature and, to prevent all danger to himself, he threw out that little spark, the Megarian decree, set the city aflame, and blew up the conflagration with a hurricane of war, so that the smoke drew tears from all Greeks both here and over there. At the very outset of this fire our vines were a-crackle, our casks knocked together; it was beyond the power of any man to stop the disaster, and Peace disappeared.



## TRYGAEUS

That, by Apollo! is what no one ever told me; I could not think what connection there could be between Phidias and Peace.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nor I, until now. This accounts for her beauty, if she is related to him. There are so many things that escape us.

## HERMES

Then, when the towns subject to you saw that you were angered one against the other and were showing each other your teeth like dogs, they hatched a thousand plots to pay you no more dues and gained over the chief citizens of Sparta at the price of gold. They, being as shamelessly greedy as they were faithless in diplomacy, chased off Peace with ignominy to let loose War. Though this was profitable to *them*, it was the ruin of the husbandmen, who were innocent of all blame; for, in revenge, your galleys went out to devour their figs.

## TRYGAEUS

And with justice too; did they not break down my black fig tree, which I had planted and dunged with my own hands?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yes, by Zeus! yes, that was well done; the wretches broke a chest for me with stones, which held six medimni of corn.

## HERMES

Then the rural labourers flocked into the city <sup>9</sup> and let themselves be bought over like the others. Not having even a grape-stone to munch and longing after their figs, they looked towards the demagogues. These well knew that the poor were driven to extremity and lacked even bread; but they nevertheless drove away the Goddess, each time she reappeared in answer to the wish of the country, with their loud shrieks that were as sharp as pitchforks; furthermore, they attacked the well-filled purses of the richest among our allies on the pretence that they belonged to Brasidas' party. And then you would tear the poor accused wretch to pieces with your teeth; for the city, all pale with hunger and cowed with terror, gladly snapped up any calumny that was thrown it to devour. So the strangers, seeing what terrible blows the informers dealt, sealed their lips with gold. They grew rich, while you, alas! you could only see that Greece was going to ruin. It was the tanner who was the author of all this woe.

## TRYGAEUS

Enough said, Hermes leave that man in Hades, whither he has gone; he no longer belongs to us, but rather to you. That he was a cheat, a

braggart, a calumniator when alive, why, nothing could be truer; but anything you might say now would be an insult to one of your own folk.<sup>10</sup> (To PEACE) Oh! venerated Goddess! why art thou silent?

## HERMES

And how could she speak to the spectators? She is too angry at all that they have made her suffer.

## TRYGAEUS

At least let her speak a little to you, Hermes.

## HERMES

Tell me, my dear, what are your feelings with regard to them? Come, you relentless foe of all bucklers, speak; I am listening to you. (PEACE *whispers into* HERMES' *car*.) Is that your grievance against them? Yes, yes, I understand. Hearken, you folk, this is her complaint. She says, that after the affair of Pylos she came to you unbidden to bring you a basket full of truces and that you thrice repulsed her by your votes in the assembly.

## TRYGAEUS

Yes, we did wrong, but forgive us, for our mind was then entirely absorbed in leather.

## HERMES

Listen again to what she has just asked me. Who was her greatest foe here? and furthermore, had she a friend who exerted himself to put an end to the fighting?

## TRYGAEUS

Her most devoted friend was Cleonymus; it is undisputed.

## HERMES

How then did Cleonymus behave in fights?

## TRYGAEUS

Oh! the bravest of warriors! Only he was not born of the father he claims; he showed it quick enough in the army by throwing away his weapons.

## HERMES

There is yet another question she has just put to me. Who rules now in the rostrum?

TRYGAEUS

It's Hyperbolus who now holds empire on the Phyx. (*To PEACE*)  
What now? you turn away your head!

HERMES

She is vexed, that the people should give themselves a wretch of that kind for their chief.

TRYGAEUS

Oh! we shall not employ him again; but the people, seeing themselves without a leader, took him haphazard, just as a man, who is naked, springs upon the first cloak he sees.

HERMES

She asks, what will be the result of such a choice by the city?

TRYGAEUS

We shall be more far-seeing in consequence.

HERMES

And why?

TRYGAEUS

Because he is a lamp-maker. Formerly we only directed our business by groping in the dark; now we shall only deliberate by lamplight.

HERMES

Oh! oh! what questions she does order me to put to you!

TRYGAEUS

What are they?

HERMES

She wants to have news of a whole heap of old-fashioned things she left here. First of all, how is Sophocles?

TRYGAEUS

Very well, but something very strange has happened to him.

HERMES

What then?

TRYGAEUS

He has turned from Sophocles into Simonides.

HERMES

Into Simonides? How so?

TRYGAEUS

Because, though old and broken-down as he is, he would put to sea on a hurdle to gain an obolus.

HERMES

And wise Cratinus, is he still alive?

TRYGAEUS

He died about the time of the Laconian invasion.

HERMES

How?

TRYGAEUS

Of a swoon. He could not bear the shock of seeing one of his casks full of wine broken. Ah! what a number of other misfortunes our city has suffered! So, dearest mistress, nothing can now separate us from thee.

HERMES

If that be so, receive Opora here for a wife; take her to the country, live with her, and grow fine grapes together.

TRYGAEUS (*to OPORA*)

Come, my dear one, come and accept my kisses. (*To HERMES*) Tell me, Hermes, my master, do you think it would hurt me to love her a little, after so long an abstinence?

HERMES

No, not if you swallow a potion of penny-royal afterwards.<sup>11</sup> But hasten to lead Theoria to the Senate; that was where she lodged before.

TRYGAEUS

Oh! fortunate Senate! Thanks to Theoria, what soups you will swallow for the space of three days! how you will devour meats and cooked tripe! Come, farewell, friend Hermes!

HERMES

And to you also, my dear sir, may you have much happiness, and don't forget me.

TRYGAEUS (*looking around for his dung-beetle*)

Come, beetle, home, home, and let us fly on a swift wing.

HERMES

Oh! he is no longer here.

TRYGAEUS

Where has he gone to then?

HERMES

He is 'harnessed to the chariot of Zeus and bears the thunderbolts.'

TRYGAEUS

But where will the poor wretch get his food?

HERMES

He will eat Ganymede's ambrosia.

TRYGAEUS

Very well then, but how am I going to descend?

HERMES

Oh! never fear, there is nothing simpler; place yourself beside the goddess.

TRYGAEUS

Come, my pretty maidens, follow me quickly; there are plenty of men waiting for you with their tools ready.

*(He goes out, with OPORA and THEORIA.)*

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Farewell and good luck be yours! Let us begin by handing over all this gear to the care of our servants, for no place is less safe than a theatre; there is always a crowd of thieves prowling around it, seeking to find some mischief to do. Come, keep a good watch over all this. As for ourselves, let us explain to the spectators what we have in our minds, the purpose of our play.

*(The CHORUS turns and faces the audience.)*

Undoubtedly the comic poet who mounted the stage to praise himself in the parabasis would deserve to be handed over to the sticks of the beadles. Nevertheless, oh Muse, if it be right to esteem the most honest and illustrious of our comic writers at his proper value, permit our poet to say that he thinks he has deserved a glorious renown. First of all, he is the one who has compelled his rivals no longer to scoff at rags or to war with lice; and as for those Heracleses, always chewing and ever hungry, he was the first to cover them with ridicule and to chase them from the stage;<sup>12</sup> he has also dismissed that slave, whom one never failed to set weeping before you, so that his comrade might have the chance of jeering at his stripes and might ask, "Wretch, what has happened to your hide? Has the lash rained an army of its thongs on you and laid your back waste?" After having delivered us from all these wearisome ineptitudes

and these low buffooneries, he has built up for us a great art, like a palace with high towers, constructed of fine phrases, great thoughts and of jokes not common on the streets. Moreover it's not obscure private persons or women that he stages in his comedies; but, bold as Heracles, it's the very greatest whom he attacks, undeterred by the fetid stink of leather or the threats of hearts of mud. He has the right to say, "I am the first ever dared to go straight for that beast with the sharp teeth and the terrible eyes that flashed lambent fire like those of Cynna, surrounded by a hundred lewd flatterers, who spittle-licked him to his heart's content; it had a voice like a roaring torrent, the stench of a seal, the unwashed balls of a Lamia and the arse of a camel."<sup>13</sup> I did not recoil in horror at the sight of such a monster, but fought him relentlessly to win your deliverance and that of the islanders." Such are the services which should be graven in your recollection and entitle me to your thanks. Yet I have not been seen frequenting the wrestling school intoxicated with success and trying to seduce young boys; but I took all my theatrical gear and returned straight home. I pained folk but little and caused them much amusement; my conscience rebuked me for nothing. (*More and more rapidly from here on*) Hence both grown men and youths should be on my side and I likewise invite the bald to give me their votes; for, if I triumph, everyone will say, both at table and at festivals, "Carry this to the bald man, give these cakes to the bald one, do not grudge the poet whose talent shines as bright as his own bare skull the share he deserves."

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, Muse! drive the war far from our city and come to preside over our dances, if you love me; come and celebrate the nuptials of the gods, the banquets of us mortals and the festivals of the fortunate; these are the themes that inspire thy most poetic songs. And should Carcinus come to beg thee for admission with his sons to thy chorus, refuse all traffic with them; remember they are but gelded birds, stork-necked dancers, mannikins about as tall as a goat's turd, in fact machine-made poets. Contrary to all expectation, the father has at last managed to finish a piece, but he admits that a cat strangled it one fine evening.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Such are the songs with which the Muse with the glorious hair inspires the able poet and which enchant the assembled populace, when the spring swallow twitters beneath the foliage; but the god spare us from the chorus of Morsimus and that of Melanthius! Oh! what a bitter discordancy grated upon my ears that day when the tragic chorus was directed by this same Melanthius and his brother,

these two Gorgons, these two Harpies, the plague of the seas, whose gluttonous bellies devour the entire race of fishes, these followers of old women, these goats with their stinking arm-pits. Oh! Muse, spit upon them abundantly and keep the feast gaily with me.

(TRYGAEUS *enters, limping painfully, accompanied by OPORA and THEORIA.*)

TRYGAEUS

Ah! it's a rough job getting to the gods! my legs are as good as broken through it. (*To the audience*) How small you were, to be sure, when seen from heaven! you had all the appearance too of being great rascals; but seen close, you look even worse.

SERVANT (*coming out of TRYGAEUS' house*)

Is that you, master?

TRYGAEUS

So I've been told.

SERVANT

What has happened to you?

TRYGAEUS

My legs pain me; it was such a damned long journey.

SERVANT

Oh! tell me . . .

TRYGAEUS

What?

SERVANT

Did you see any other man besides yourself strolling about in heaven?

TRYGAEUS

No, only the souls of two or three dithyrambic poets.

SERVANT

What were they doing up there?

TRYGAEUS

They were seeking to catch some lyric exordia as they flew by immersed in the billows of the air.

SERVANT

Is it true, what they tell us, that men are turned into stars after death?

TRYGAEUS

Quite true.

SERVANT

Then what star has Ion of Chios turned into?

TRYGAEUS

The Morning Star, the one he wrote a poem about; as soon as he got up there, everyone called him the Morning Star.

SERVANT

And those stars like sparks, that plough up the air as they dart across the sky.

TRYGAEUS

They are the rich leaving the feast with a lantern and a light inside it.— But hurry up, show this young girl into my house, (*pointing to OPORA*) clean out the bath, heat some water and prepare the nuptial couch for herself and me. When that's done, come back here; meanwhile I am off to present this other one to the Senate.

SERVANT

But where then did you get these girls?

TRYGAEUS

Where? why in heaven.

SERVANT

I would not give more than an obolus for gods who have got to keeping; brothels like us mere mortals.

TRYGAEUS

They are not all like that, but there are some up there too who live by this trade.

SERVANT

Come, that's rich! But tell me, shall I give her something to eat?

TRYGAEUS

No, for she would touch neither bread nor cake; she is used to licking ambrosia at the table of the gods.

SERVANT

Well, we can give her something to lick down here too.

(*He takes OPORA into the house.*)



CHORUS (*singing*)

Here is a truly happy old man, as far as I can judge.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Ah! but what shall I be, when you see me presently dressed for the wedding?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Made young again by love and scented with perfumes, your lot will be one we all shall envy.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

And when I lie beside her and fondle her breasts?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! then you will be happier than those spinning-tops who call Carcinus their father.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

And I well deserve it; have I not bestridden a beetle to save the Greeks, who now, thanks to me, can make love at their ease and sleep peacefully on their farms?

SERVANT (*returning from the house*)

The girl has quitted the bath; she is charming from head to foot, belly and buttocks too; the cake is baked and they are kneading the sesamé-biscuit; nothing is lacking but the bridegroom's tool.

## TRYGAEUS

Let us first hasten to lodge Theoria in the hands of the Senate.

## SERVANT

Tell me, who is this woman?

## TRYGAEUS

Why, it's Theoria, with whom we used formerly to go to Brauron, to get tipsy and frolic. I had the greatest trouble to get hold of her.

## SERVANT

Ah! you charmer! what pleasure your pretty bottom will afford me every four years!

TRYGAEUS (*to the audience*)

Let's see, which one of you is steady enough to be trusted by the Senate with the care of this charming wench? (*to the SERVANT*) Hi! you, friend! what are you drawing there?

SERVANT (*who has been making signs in the air*)

It's er . . . well, at the Isthmian Games I shall have a tent for my tool.

TRYGAEUS (*to the audience*)

Come, who wishes to take the charge of her? No one? Come, Theoria, I am going to lead you into the midst of the spectators and confide you to their care.

SERVANT

Ah! there is one who makes a sign to you.

TRYGAEUS

Who is it?

SERVANT

It's Ariphrades. He wishes to take her home at once.

TRYGAEUS

No, he must not. He would soon have her done for, absorbing all her life-force. Come, Theoria, take off all these clothes. (*THEORIA undresses. As soon as she is nude, TRYGAEUS conducts her to the front row of seats, where the SENATORS sit.*) Senate, Prytanēs, gaze upon Theoria and see what precious blessings I place in your hands. Hasten to raise its limbs and to immolate the victim. And look at this chimney.

SERVANT

God, what a beautiful one! It's black with smoke because the Senate used to do its cooking there before the war.<sup>14</sup>

TRYGAEUS

Now that you have found Theoria again, you can start the most charming games from to-morrow, wrestling with her on the ground, on all fours, or you can lay her on her side, or stand before her with bent knees, or, well rubbed with oil, you can boldly enter the lists, as in the Pancratium, belabouring your foe with blows from your fist or something else. The next day you will celebrate equestrian games, in which the riders will ride side by side, or else the chariot teams, thrown one on top of another, panting and whinnying, will roll and knock against each other on the ground, while other rivals, thrown out of their seats, will fall before reaching the goal, utterly exhausted by their efforts.—Come, Prytanēs, take Theoria. Oh! look how graciously yonder fellow has received her; you would not have been in such a hurry to introduce her to the Senate, if nothing were coming to you through it; <sup>15</sup> you would not have failed to plead some holiday as an excuse.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Such a man as you assures the happiness of all his fellow-citizens.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

When you are gathering your vintages you will prize me even better.

CHORUS (*singing*)

E'en from to-day we hail you as the deliverer of mankind.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Wait until you have drunk a beaker of new wine, before you appraise my true merits.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Excepting the gods, there is none greater than yourself, and that will ever be our opinion.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Yea, Trygaeus of Athmonia has deserved well of you, he has freed both husbandman and craftsman from the most cruel ills; he has vanquished Hyberbolus.

SERVANT

Well then, what must be done now?

TRYGAEUS

You must offer pots of green-stuff to the goddess to consecrate her altars.

SERVANT

Pots of green-stuff as we do to poor Hermes—and even he thinks the fare pretty mean?

TRYGAEUS

What will you offer then? A fatted bull?

SERVANT

Oh no! I don't want to start bellowing the battle-cry.<sup>16</sup>

TRYGAEUS

A great fat swine then?

SERVANT

No, no.

TRYGAEUS

Why not?

SERVANT

We don't want any of the swinishness of Theagenes.

TRYGAEUS

What other victim do you prefer then?

SERVANT

A sheep.

TRYGAEUS

A sheep?

SERVANT

Yes.

TRYGAEUS

But that's the Ionic form of the word.

SERVANT

Purposely. So that if anyone in the assembly says, "We must go to war," all may start bleating in alarm, "Oĩ, oĩ."

TRYGAEUS

A brilliant idea.

SERVANT

And we shall all be lambs one toward the other, yes, and milder still toward the allies.

TRYGAEUS

Then go for the sheep and haste to bring it back with you; I will prepare the altar for the sacrifice.

*(They both leave.)*

CHORUS (*singing*)

How everything succeeds to our wish, when the gods are willing and Fortune favours us! how opportunely everything falls out.

TRYGAEUS (*returning*)

Nothing could be truer, for look! here stands the altar all ready at my door.

*(He enters his house.)*

CHORUS (*singing*)

Hurry, hurry, for the winds are fickle; make haste, while the divine will is set on stopping this cruel war and is showering on us the most striking benefits.

TRYGAEUS (*returning*)

Here is the basket of barley-seed mingled with salt, the chaplet and the sacred knife; and there is the fire; so we are only waiting for the sheep.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Hasten, hasten, for, if Chaeris sees you, he will come without bidding, he and his flute; and when you see him puffing and panting and out of breath, you will have to give him something.

TRYGAEUS (*to the SERVANT who has returned with a sheep and a vase of water*)

Come, seize the basket and take the lustral water and hurry to circle round the altar to the right.

## SERVANT

There! that's done. What is your next bidding?

## TRYGAEUS

Wait. I take this fire-brand first and plunge it into the water. Now quick, quick, you sprinkle the altar. Give me some barley-seed, purify yourself and hand me the basin; then scatter the rest of the barley among the audience.

## SERVANT

Done.

## TRYGAEUS

You have thrown it?

## SERVANT

Yes, by Hermes! and all the spectators have had their share.

## TRYGAEUS

At least the women got none.

## SERVANT

Oh! their husbands will give them some this evening.

## TRYGAEUS

Let us pray! Who is here? Are there any good men? <sup>17</sup>

SERVANT

Come, give me the water, so that I may sprinkle these people. Faith! they are indeed good, brave men.

*(He throws the lustral water on them.)*

TRYGAEUS

You believe so?

SERVANT

I am sure, and the proof of it is that we have flooded them with lustral water and they have not budged an inch.

TRYGAEUS

Let us pray, then, as soon as we can.

SERVANT

Yes, let us pray.

TRYGAEUS

Oh! Peace, mighty queen, venerated goddess, thou, who presidest over choruses and at nuptials, deign to accept the sacrifices we offer thee.

SERVANT

Receive it, greatly honoured mistress, and behave not like the courtesans, who half open the door to entice the gallants, draw back when they are stared at, to return once more if a man passes on. But do not thou act like this to us.

TRYGAEUS

No, but like an honest woman, show thyself to thy worshippers, who are worn with regretting thee all these thirteen years. Hush the noise of battle, be a true Lysimacha to us. Put an end to this tittle-tattle, to this idle babble, that set us defying one another. Cause the Greeks once more to taste the pleasant beverage of friendship and temper all hearts with the gentle feeling of forgiveness. Make excellent commodities flow to our markets, fine heads of garlic, early cucumbers, apples, pomegranates and nice little cloaks for the slaves; make them bring geese, ducks, pigeons and larks from Boeotia and baskets of eels from Lake Copais; we shall all rush to buy them, disputing their possession with Morychus, Teleas, Glaucetes and every other glutton. Melanthius will arrive on the market last of all; they'll say, "no more eels, all sold!" and then he'll start groaning and exclaiming as in his monologue of Medea, "I am dying, I am dying! Alas! I have let those hidden in the beet escape me!" And won't we laugh? These are the wishes, mighty goddess, which we pray thee to grant. *(To the SERVANT)* Take the knife and slaughter the sheep like a finished cook.

SERVANT

No, the goddess does not wish it.

TRYGAEUS

And why not?

SERVANT

Blood cannot please Peace, so let us spill none upon her altar.

TRYGAEUS

Then go and sacrifice the sheep in the house, cut off the legs and bring them here; thus the carcase will be saved for the Choregus.

*(The SERVANT goes into the house with the sheep.)*

CHORUS (*singing*)

You, who remain here, get chopped wood and everything needed for the sacrifice ready.

TRYGAEUS

Don't I look like a diviner preparing his mystic fire?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Undoubtedly. Will anything that a wise man ought to know escape you? Don't you know all that a man should know, who is distinguished for his wisdom and inventive daring?

TRYGAEUS

There! the wood catches. Its smoke blinds poor Stilbides. I am now going to bring the table and thus be my own slave.

*(He goes into the house.)*

CHORUS (*singing*)

You have braved a thousand dangers to save your sacred town. All honour to you! your glory will be ever envied.

TRYGAEUS (*returning with a table*)

Wait. Here are the legs, place them upon the altar. For myself, I mean to go back to the entrails and the cakes.

*(He is about to go into the house.)*

SERVANT (*going in ahead of him*)

I'll take care of them.

TRYGAEUS

But I want you here.

SERVANT (*returning*)

Well then, here I am. Do you think I have taken long?

TRYGAEUS

Just get this roasted. Ah! who is this man, crowned with laurel, who is coming to me?

SERVANT

He has a self-important look; is he some diviner?

TRYGAEUS

No, it's Hierocles, that oracle-monger from Oreus.

SERVANT

What is he going to tell us?

TRYGAEUS

Evidently he is coming to oppose the peace.

SERVANT

No, it's the odour of the fat that attracts him.

TRYGAEUS

Let us appear not to see him.

SERVANT

Very well.

HIEROCLES (*approaching*)

What sacrifice is this? to what god are you offering it?

TRYGAEUS (*to the SERVANT*)

Keep quiet.—(*Aloud*) Look after the roasting and keep your hands off the meat.

HIEROCLES

To whom are you sacrificing? Answer me.

TRYGAEUS

Ah! the tail is showing favourable omens.<sup>18</sup>

SERVANT

Aye, very favourable, oh, loved and mighty Peace!

HIEROCLES

Come, cut off the first offering<sup>19</sup> and make the oblation.

TRYGAEUS

It's not roasted enough,



HIEROCLES

Yea, truly, it's done to a turn.

TRYGAEUS

Mind your own business, friend! (*To the SERVANT*) Cut away.

HIEROCLES

Where is the table?

TRYGAEUS

Bring the libations.

*(The SERVANT departs.)*

HIEROCLES

The tongue is cut separately.

TRYGAEUS

We know all that. But just listen to one piece of advice.

HIEROCLES

And that is?

TRYGAEUS

Don't talk, for it is divine Peace to whom we are sacrificing.

HIEROCLES (*in an oracular tone*)

Oh! wretched mortals, oh, you idiots!

TRYGAEUS

Keep such ugly terms for yourself.

HIEROCLES (*as before*)

What! you are so ignorant you don't understand the will of the gods and you make a treaty, you, who are men, with apes, who are full of malice?

TRYGAEUS

Ha, ha, ha!

HIEROCLES

What are you laughing at?

TRYGAEUS

Ha, ha! your apes amuse me!

HIEROCLES (*resuming the oracular manner*)

You simple pigeons, you trust yourselves to foxes, who are all craft, both in mind and heart.

TRYGAEUS

Oh, you trouble-maker! may your lungs get as hot as this meat!

HIEROCLES

Nay, nay! if only the Nymphs had not fooled Bacis, and Bacis mortal men; and if the Nymphs had not tricked Bacis a second time . . .

TRYGAEUS (*mocking his manner*)

May the plague seize you, if you don't stop Bacizing!

HIEROCLES

. . . it would not have been written in the book of Fate that the bonds of Peace must be broken; but first . . .

TRYGAEUS

The meat must be dusted with salt.

HIEROCLES

. . . it does not please the blessed gods that we should stop the War until the wolf uniteth with the sheep.

(*A kind of oracle-match now ensues.*)

TRYGAEUS

How, you cursed animal, could the wolf ever unite with the sheep?

HIEROCLES

As long as the wood-bug gives off a fetid odour, when it flies; as long as the noisy bitch is forced by nature to litter blind pups, so long shall peace be forbidden.

TRYGAEUS

Then what should be done? Not to stop War would be to leave it to the decision of chance which of the two people should suffer the most, whereas by uniting under a treaty, we share the empire of Greece.

HIEROCLES

You will never make the crab walk straight.

TRYGAEUS

You shall no longer be fed at the Prytaneum; when the war is over, oracles are not wanted.

HIEROCLES

You will never smooth the rough spikes of the hedgehog.

TRYGAEUS

Will you never stop fooling the Athenians?

HIEROCLES

What oracle ordered you to burn these joints of mutton in honour of the gods?

TRYGAEUS

This grand oracle of Homer's: "Thus vanished the dark war-clouds and we offered a sacrifice to new-born Peace. When the flame had consumed the thighs of the victim and its inwards had appeased our hunger, we poured out the libations of wine." 'Twas I who arranged the sacred rites, but none offered the shining cup to the diviner.<sup>20</sup>

HIEROCLES

I care little for that. 'Tis not the Sibyl who spoke it.

TRYGAEUS

Wise Homer has also said: "He who delights in the horrors of civil war has neither country nor laws nor home." What noble words!

HIEROCLES

Beware lest the kite turn your brain and rob . . .

TRYGAEUS (*to the SERVANT who has returned with the libations*)

Look out, slave! This oracle threatens our meat. Quick, pour the libation, and give me some of the inwards.

HIEROCLES

I too will help myself to a bit, if you like.

TRYGAEUS

The libation! the libation!

HIEROCLES (*to the SERVANT*)

Pour out also for me and give me some of this meat.

TRYGAEUS

No, the blessed gods won't allow it yet; let us drink; and as for you, get you gone, for that's their will. Mighty Peace! stay ever in our midst.

HIEROCLES

Bring the tongue hither.

TRYGAEUS

Relieve us of your own.

HIEROCLES

The libation.

TRYGAEUS

Here! and this into the bargain. (*He strikes him.*)

HIEROCLES

You will not give me any meat?

TRYGAEUS

We cannot give you any until the wolf unites with the sheep.

HIEROCLES

I will embrace your knees.

TRYGAEUS

'Tis lost labour, good fellow; you will never smooth the rough spikes of the hedgehog. . . . Come, spectators, join us in our feast.

HIEROCLES

And what am I to do?

TRYGAEUS

You? go and eat the Sibyl.

HIEROCLES

No, by the Earth! no, you shall not eat without me; if you do not give, I shall take; it's common property.

TRYGAEUS (*to the SERVANT*)

Strike, strike this Bacis, this humbugging soothsayer.

HIEROCLES

I take to witness . . .

TRYGAEUS

And I also, that you are a glutton and an impostor. (*To the SERVANT*)  
Hold him tight and I'll beat the impostor with a stick.

SERVANT

You look to that; I will snatch the skin from him which he has stolen from us.

## TRYGAEUS

Let go that skin, you priest from hell! do you hear! Oh! what a fine crow has come from Oreus! Stretch your wings quickly for Elymnium.

(HIEROCLES flees. TRYGAEUS and the SERVANT go into the house.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! joy, joy! no more helmet, no more cheese nor onions! No, I have no passion for battles; what I love is to drink with good comrades in the corner by the fire when good dry wood, cut in the height of the summer, is crackling; it is to cook pease on the coals and beech-nuts among the embers, it is to kiss our pretty Thracian while my wife is at the bath.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nothing is more pleasing, when the rain is sprouting our sowings, than to chat with some friend, saying, "Tell me, Comarchides, what shall we do? I would willingly drink myself, while the heavens are watering our fields. Come, wife, cook three measures of beans, adding to them a little wheat, and give us some figs. Syra! call Manes off the fields, it's impossible to prune the vine or to align the ridges, for the ground is too wet to-day. Let someone bring me the thrush and those two chaffinches; there were also some curds and four pieces of hare, unless the cat stole them last evening, for I know not what the infernal noise was that I heard in the house. Serve up three of the pieces for me, slave, and give the fourth to my father. Go and ask Aeschinades for some myrtle branches with berries on them, and then, for it's on the same road, invite Charinades to come and drink with me to the honour of the gods who watch over our crops."

CHORUS (*singing*)

When the grasshopper sings his dulcet tune, I love to see the Lemnian vines beginning to ripen, the earliest plant of all. Likewise I love to watch the fig filling out, and when it has reached maturity I eat it with appreciation, exclaiming, "Oh! delightful season!" Then too I bruise some thyme and infuse it in water. Indeed I grow a great deal fatter passing the summer in this way . . .

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

. . . than in watching a damned lieutenant with three plumes and military cloak of crimson, very livid indeed; he calls it the real Sardian purple, but if he ever has to fight in this cloak he'll dye it another colour, the real Cyzicene yellow, he the first to run away, shaking his plumes like a buff hippalectryon, and I am left to do the real work. Once back again in Athens, these brave fellows behave abominably; they write down these, they scratch through others, and this backwards and forwards two or

three times at random. The departure is set for to-morrow, and some citizen has brought no provisions, because he didn't know he had to go; he stops in front of the statue of Pandion, reads his name, is dumbfounded and starts away at a run, weeping bitter tears. The townsfolk are less ill-used, but that is how the husbandmen are treated by these men of war, the hated of the gods and of men, who know nothing but how to throw away their shield. For this reason, if it please heaven, I propose to call these rascals to account, for they are lions in times of peace, but sneaking foxes when it comes to fighting.

TRYGAEUS (*coming out of his house, followed by the SERVANT*)

Oh! oh! what a crowd for the nuptial feast! Here! dust the tables with this crest, which is good for nothing else now. Halloo! produce the cakes, the thrushes, plenty of good jugged hare and the little loaves.

(*A SICKLE-MAKER enters with a comrade; one carries sickles, the other casks.*)

SICKLE-MAKER

Trygaeus, where is Trygaeus?

TRYGAEUS

I am cooking the thrushes.

SICKLE-MAKER

Trygaeus, my best of friends, what a fine stroke of business you have done for me by bringing back Peace! Formerly my sickles would not have sold at an obolus apiece, to-day I am being paid fifty drachmae for every one. And here is a neighbour who is selling his casks for the country at three drachmae each. So come, Trygaeus, take as many sickles and casks as you will for nothing. Accept them for nothing; it's because of our handsome profits on our sales that we offer you these wedding presents.

TRYGAEUS

Thanks. Put them all down inside there, and come along quick to the banquet. Ah! do you see that armourer yonder coming with a wry face? (*Enter an armourer, followed by other personages who represent the various specialized trades which have profited by the war, a crest-maker, a manufacturer of breastplates, a trumpet-maker, a helmet-maker, a polisher of lances; each carries a sample of his products. The armourer is the only one who speaks.*)

ARMOURER

Alas! alas! Trygaeus, you have ruined me utterly.

TRYGAEUS

What! won't the crests go any more, friend?

ARMOURER

You have killed my business, my livelihood, and that of this poor lance-maker too.

TRYGAEUS

Come, come, what are you asking for these two crests?

ARMOURER

What do you bid for them?

TRYGAEUS

What do I bid? Oh! I am ashamed to say. Still, as the clasp is of good workmanship, I would give two, even three measures of dried figs; I could use them for dusting the table.

ARMOURER

All right, tell them to bring me the dried figs. (*To the crest-maker*) That's better than nothing, my friend.

TRYGAEUS

Take them away, be off with your crests and get you gone; they are moulting, they are losing all their hair; I would not give a single fig for them.

ARMOURER

Good gods, what am I going to do with this fine ten-mina breastplate, which is so splendidly made?

TRYGAEUS

Oh, you will lose nothing over it. Sell it to me at cost price. It would be very useful as a thunder-mug . . .

ARMOURER

Cease your insults, both to me and my wares.

TRYGAEUS

. . . if propped on three stones. (*He sits on it.*) Look, it's admirable.

ARMOURER

But how can you wipe yourself, idiot?

TRYGAEUS (*with appropriate gestures*)

I can put one hand through here, and the other there, and so . . .

ARMOURER

What! do you wipe yourself with both hands?

TRYGAEUS

Aye, so that I may not be accused of robbing the State, by blocking up an oar-hole in the galley.<sup>21</sup>

ARMOURER

Would you crap in a thunder-mug that cost ten minae?

TRYGAEUS

Undoubtedly, you rascal. Do you think I would sell my arse for a thousand drachmae?

ARMOURER

Come, have the money paid over to me.

TRYGAEUS

No, friend; I find it pinches my bottom. Take it away, I won't buy it.

ARMOURER

What is to be done with this trumpet, for which I gave sixty drachmae the other day?

TRYGAEUS

Pour lead into the hollow and fit a good, long stick to the top; and you will have a balanced cottabus.

ARMOURER

Don't mock me.

TRYGAEUS

Well, here's another idea. Pour in lead as I said, add here a dish hung on strings, and you will have a balance for weighing the figs which you give your slaves in the fields.

ARMOURER

Cursed fate! I am ruined. Here are helmets, for which I gave a mina each. What am I to do with them? who will buy them?

TRYGAEUS

Go and sell them to the Egyptians; they will do for measuring laxatives.

ARMOURER

Ah! poor helmet-maker, things are indeed in a bad way.



TRYGAEUS

He has no cause for complaint.

ARMOURER

But helmets will be no more used.

TRYGAEUS

Let him learn to fit a handle to them and he can sell them for more money.

ARMOURER

Let us be off, comrade.

TRYGAEUS

No, I want to buy these spears.

ARMOURER

What will you give?

TRYGAEUS

If they could be split in two, I would take them at a drachma per hundred to use as vine-props.

ARMOURER

The insolent dog! Let us go, friend.

*(The munitions-makers all depart.)*

TRYGAEUS (*as some young boys enter*)

Ah! here come the guests, young folks from the table to take a pee; I fancy they also want to hum over what they will be singing presently. Hi! child! what do you reckon to sing? Stand there and give me the opening line.

BOY

"Glory to the young warriors. . . ." <sup>22</sup>

TRYGAEUS

Oh! leave off about your young warriors, you little wretch; we are at peace and you are an idiot and a rascal.

BOY

"The skirmish begins, the hollow bucklers clash against each other."

TRYGAEUS

Bucklers! Leave me in peace with your bucklers.

Boy

"And then there came groanings and shouts of victory."

TRYGAEUS

Groanings! ah! by Bacchus! look out for yourself, you cursed squaller, if you start wearying us again with your groanings and hollow bucklers.

Boy

Then what should I sing? Tell me what pleases you.

TRYGAEUS

"'Tis thus they feasted on the flesh of oxen," or something similar, as, for instance, "Everything that could tickle the palate was placed on the table."

Boy

"'Tis thus they feasted on the flesh of oxen and, tired of warfare, unharnessed their foaming steeds."

TRYGAEUS

That's splendid; tired of warfare, they seat themselves at table; sing, sing to us how they still go on eating after they are satiated.

Boy

"The meal over, they girded themselves . . ."

TRYGAEUS

With good wine, no doubt?

Boy

". . . with armour and rushed forth from the towers, and a terrible shout arose."<sup>23</sup>

TRYGAEUS

Get you gone, you little scapegrace, you and your battles! You sing of nothing but warfare. Who is your father then?

Boy

My father?

TRYGAEUS

Why yes, your father.

Boy

I am Lamachus' son.

## TRYGAEUS

Oh! oh! I could indeed have sworn, when I was listening to you, that you were the son of some warrior, who dreams of nothing but wounds and bruises, of some Bulomachus or Clausimachus; go and sing your plaguey songs to the spearmen. . . . Where is the son of Cleonymus? Sing me something before going back to the feast. I am at least certain he will not sing of battles, for his father is far too careful a man.

## SON OF CLEONYMUS

"A Saian is parading with the spotless shield which I regret to say I have thrown into a thicket."

## TRYGAEUS

Tell me, you little good-for-nothing, are you singing that for your father?

## SON OF CLEONYMUS

"But I saved my life." <sup>24</sup>

## TRYGAEUS

And dishonoured your family. But let us go in; I am very certain, that being the son of such a father, you will never forget this song of the buckler. (*To the CHORUS*) You, who remain to the feast, it's your duty to devour dish after dish and not to ply empty jaws. Come, put heart into the work and eat with your mouths full. For, believe me, poor friends, white teeth are useless furniture if they chew nothing.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to TRYGAEUS, who is going into the house*)

Never fear; thanks all the same for your good advice. (*To the CHORUS*) And all of you, who yesterday were dying of hunger, come, stuff yourselves with this fine hare-stew; it's not every day that we find cakes lying neglected. Eat, eat, or I predict you will soon regret it.

TRYGAEUS (*coming out of the house*)

Silence! Keep silence! Here is the bride about to appear! Take nuptial torches and let all rejoice and join in our songs. Then, when we have danced, clinked our cups and thrown Hyperbolus through the doorway we will carry back all our farming tools to the fields and shall pray the gods to give wealth to the Greeks and to cause us all to gather in an abundant barley harvest, enjoy a noble vintage, to grant that we may choke with good figs, that our wives may prove fruitful, that in fact we may recover all our lost blessings, and that the sparkling fire may be restored to the hearth. (*OPORA comes out of the house, followed by torch-bearing slaves.*) Come, wife, to the fields and seek, my beauty, to brighten and enliven my nights. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! thrice happy man, who so well deserve your good fortune! Oh!  
Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

What shall we do to her?

CHORUS (*singing*)

What shall we do to her?

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

We will gather her kisses.

CHORUS (*singing*)

We will gather her kisses.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*singing*)

But come, comrades, we who are in the first row, let us pick up the  
bridegroom and carry him in triumph. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!  
Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

You shall have a fine house, no cares and the finest of figs. Oh! Hy-  
men! oh! Hymenaeus! Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*singing*)

The bridegroom's fig is great and thick; the bride's very soft and  
tender.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

While eating and drinking deep draughts of wine, continue to re-  
peat: Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus! Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!  
Hail, hail, my friends. All who come with me shall have cakes galore.

## NOTES FOR PEACE

1. Zeus often bore the epithet *kataibatos*, "he who descends in thunder"; Aristophanes has added one letter and coined *skataibatos*, "he who descends in ordure." A French translator renders this as *Zeus Merdoyant*, *kataibatos* being *Foudroyant*.

2. "Going to the crows" was the ancient way of "going to Hell."

3. According to the fable the eagle and the beetle were at war; the eagle devoured the beetle's young and the latter retaliated by getting into its nest and tumbling out its eggs. The eagle then complained to Zeus and was advised to lay its eggs in his bosom; the beetle then flew up to the house of Zeus and began buzzing around his ears. When he rose to chase the insect away the eagle's eggs fell to the earth and were smashed to bits.

4. Euripides was often censured by the critics and laughed at by the comic poets because of the wretchedness of so many of his heroes. See *The Acharnians* (411 ff.).

5. The Spartan pestle was Brasidas; see the Glossary.

6. The usual fare of soldiers was bread, cheese, and onions.

7. See under Mysteries in the Glossary.

8. This is a reference to the fact that Athens' life depended on the maintenance of her naval supremacy.

9. This was a consequence of the Spartan invasions of Attica, which had taken place in almost every year of the war.

10. The tanner is, of course, Cleon. The following remarks of Trygaeus have always excited the sentimentalists, who readily forget the hostility of everything else that is said about Cleon in this play and eagerly foist upon Aristophanes a number of emotions utterly foreign to his age and repugnant to his personality. He was far too realistic to impute all the cardinal virtues to any dead scoundrel and what Trygaeus means is simply that the demagogue, now that he is dead and there is no longer any ulterior reason for attacking him, has ceased to have much value as a source of satirical humour. This does not, however, prevent him from making the familiar jest about leather, only a few lines below. How tightly the sentimentalists have to squint to see themselves mirrored in Aristophanes!

11. The ancients used infusions of penny-royal to alleviate the colic occasioned by excessive consumption of fruit.

12. The Heracles of comedy, traditionally a gluttonous buffoon, was a stock character that even Aristophanes, despite the disdain of the present remark, found useful on occasion, see *The Birds* (1574 ff.). The Heracles of Euripides' *Alceste* is not far removed from his comic prototype.

13. These four lines are repeated verbatim from the parabasis of *The Wasps*.

14. This whole passage is one of the most brilliant examples of sustained and varied *double entendre* in ancient literature. The only point requiring comment is the Senate's cooking; this was the roasting, on a spit, of meats before the sacrifice; cf. a similar jest in *The Acharnians* (796).

15. One of the offices of the Prytanes was to introduce those who asked admission to the Senate, but it would seem that none could obtain this favour without payment. The refusal was most often made on the pretext of a festival, and such celebrations were extraordinarily numerous in the Athenian calendar. Thus the man who refused to be mulcted might have to wait a long time.

16. There is a pun here on the Greek words *bous*, "bull" and *boethein*, "to aid in battle."

17. Before sacrificing, the officiating person asked, "Who is here?" and those present answered, "Many good men."

18. At sacrifices the tail was cut off the victim and thrown into the fire. From the way it burnt one was supposed to be able to tell whether or not the sacrifice was agreeable to the deity.

19. The first offering was the part that belonged to the priest or diviner. Hierocles expects to receive this and is thus eager to see it cut off.

20. This "oracle" is not a real passage from Homer, but merely a sort of cento of epic formulae, improvised by Trygaeus to suit the occasion. The next one, however, is correctly quoted from the *Iliad* (IX, 63 f.).

21. The trierarchs, those officials whose duty it was to man the ships of the Athenian navy, were wont to supply an inadequate number of rowers and thus to save or to embezzle some of the wages which they or the state had to pay. In order to render the deficiency less obvious they would stop up the oar-holes at which rowers should have been and were not.

22. This is the opening line of *The Epigoni*, a post-Homeric epic which recounted the second and successful attack of the Argive army on the city of Thebes. The first attack, which was a failure, forms the subject of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*.

23. These lines are a sort of gentleman's quotation of *Iliad* IV, 446 ff.

24. This is a quotation from one of the most famous of the elegies of the Greek poet Archilochus of Paros; because of his unsoldierly conduct he is reported to have been forbidden to enter Spartan territory.

VI  
THE BIRDS



## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

EUELPIDES  
PITHETAERUS  
TROCHILUS, *Servant to Elops*  
EPOPS (*the Hoopoe*)  
A BIRD  
A HERALD  
A PRIEST  
A POET  
AN ORACLE-MONGER  
METON, *a Geometrician*  
AN INSPECTOR  
A DEALER IN DECREES  
IRIS  
A PARRICIDE  
CINESIAS, *a Dithyrambic Poet*  
AN INFORMER  
PROMETHEUS  
POSIDON  
TRIBALLUS  
HERACLES  
SLAVES OF PITHIFTAERUS  
MESSENGERS  
CHORUS OF BIRDS

## INTRODUCTION

AFTER the production of *Peace* there intervene six years during which Aristophanes' literary activity is so lost to our view that we are by no means certain that he wrote for the theatre at all, and a copious list of titles preserved from plays that have not survived exhibits few that we may, and none that we must, assign to the years 420-415. In 414, however, the dramatist effected a twofold reappearance on the Athenian stage, and the Lenaeon festival was graced with the lost *Amphiaraus*, while at the Great Dionysia the poet produced *The Birds*, which we have the great good fortune to possess. The play is the longest and the most lyrical of the eleven that have come down to us, and its general merits are such that the relatively small amount of bawdiness in it has led many to designate it as the finest, or at least the most delightful, of Aristophanes' compositions. This judgment, however, was not shared by the Athenian spectators, and the poet had to content himself with the second prize, but the inadequate award will surprise only those who have read the victorious *Knights* with insufficient candour or total absence of taste. *The Birds* is just such a comedy as the auguries evinced in the earlier creations of the poet's art have led us to expect, but it is also the first extant play which embodies the Utopian theme that is to dominate so much of Aristophanes' later work, and its central position as the sixth of the eleven thus acquires a more than chronological significance. Unfortunately it is no less fruitless than fascinating to speculate on the question of how much this is due to a desire on the poet's part to find in his comic Republics an escape from a world which he thought both misguided and incorrigible, and how much to his constant and enthusiastic effort fully to exploit every possibility offered by the traditional form of the Old Comedy. An important and primordial feature of this form was the *Gamos*, which had often been specialized into a motif of rejuvenation, and even in some of the earlier plays we may discern the beginnings of a generalization and extension whereby the rejuvenation is no longer effected in the individual alone, but in the society or the state as a whole. Such are the aims of Demos in *The Knights*, after Agoracritus has freshened him up on his stove, and the concluding scenes of *Peace* more closely approximate the realization of

similar dreams. But in these comedies the rejuvenation of society is subordinate and subsequent to the attainment of a particular political aim; in *The Birds* it has attained its full maturity and becomes the central motif of a comedy which is wholly political in its theme without taking a stand or making an attack on any specific political issue.

The opening scene introduces us to a pair of typical Athenians, Euelpides and Pithetaerus, whose patience has been so thoroughly exhausted by the stupidities and the annoyances of life in Athens that they have resolved to seek habitation elsewhere. Remembering the myth that Epops, the hoopoe, had once, long ago, been a man, they trudge before us on their long journey to consult, instead of the customary Pythian priestess, the metamorphosed Tereus, and thus to derive double advantage from the survivals of his human sympathies and the extent of his geographic knowledge. Before leaving Athens they have purchased winged pets from a bird-seller, to direct them on their adventure, and these hitherto disappointing guides now exhibit their true worth and indicate to their owners that they have reached their destination. After duly knocking on a nearby rock Euelpides attracts the attention of Trochilus, the slave of Epops, who suddenly rushes forth from the thicket in which his master dwells, and by his terrifying aspect chills the hearts and moves the bowels of the eminently human Athenians. He is finally prevailed upon to summon Epops, and Euelpides details the Sybaritic characteristics of the society they are looking for. A number of places are suggested by Epops and rejected, for typically Athenian reasons, by Euelpides, and just as the latter is rather diffidently enquiring what it is like to live with the birds, Pithetaerus, who has been silent for some time, suddenly bursts forth with a grandiose and thoroughly Athenian scheme whereby the supreme power of the universe may be put into the hands of the birds. The central position of their habitat will enable them to dominate the gods by intercepting their sacrificial supplies and they can terrorize mankind by the threat of devastating the crops. Epops is quickly enchanted with the plan and summons his aerial countrymen to a debate on the question, thus motivating the entrance of the Chorus.

A gaudy variety of winged creatures now assembles from all parts of the world, but Pithetaerus' magnificent schemes seem for a while destined to meet with premature frustration because of the inability of the birds to control their anger at the presumptuousness which has prompted two of their ancestral enemies to invade their domain. They are about to peck out the eyes of the terrified Athenians, who hurriedly arm themselves with kitchen utensils, but Epops finally succeeds in calming their wrath and inducing them to listen to the splendid proposals of Pithetaerus. With characteristic plausibility the Athenian demonstrates that the birds were the lords of the universe long before the Olympians, and convinces his

astonished auditors that with their cooperation he and Euelpides will re-establish them in their pristine supremacy. The Chorus enthusiastically supports the plan and the two Athenians follow Epops into his thicket, to procure wings for themselves and to work out the details of the project.

The stage is now left to the Chorus, which delivers the parabasis. The anapests, introduced by a brief lyric passage on the charms of Procné, the nightingale mate of Epops, recount the origin and early history of the world as the birds conceive it, and add to this a list of the services which they render mankind and of the reasons why men should worship the birds as gods. The ode is a lovely lyric, interspersed with bird-calls, on the theme of the music produced by the birds. The epirrheme details the advantages of life with the birds. The antode is thematically similar to the ode, but surpasses it in poetic beauty. The antepirrheme catalogues the advantages of possessing wings. Nowhere in this comedy is its essentially general nature more clearly exhibited than here in the parabasis, where we expect a definite exposition of the dramatist's views or advice on some particular political question.

At the conclusion of the parabasis Pithetaerus and Euelpides, now equipped with wings, emerge from the thicket and set about the organization of the new city, which is forthwith named Nephelococcygia and placed under the protection of Athené Polias. Euelpides is dispatched on a complicated errand, and a priest is summoned to perform a sacrifice, but he never concludes the endless list of the birds to whom prayers are to be addressed, and Pithetaerus, in desperation, takes over the sacrifice himself. He is interrupted, however, by the arrival of a series of familiar and typically Athenian nuisances, who have learned of the new city and are now eager to ply their trades in fresh, and presumably more profitable, surroundings. Accordingly Pithetaerus is compelled to beat off, in increasingly rapid succession, a poet who would hymn the glories of Nephelococcygia, an oracle-monger bursting with sayings of Bacis, Meton, the great mathematician and calendar-reformer, who would exercise his geometry in the planning of the town, an inspector sent out by the ever alert and meddlesome Athens, and a seller of decrees, who arrives with a complete set of laws for the government of the city. Pithetaerus now perceives that he will never be given an opportunity to finish his sacrifice if he stays in the open; he accordingly goes into the thicket, and the stage is for the second time left to the Chorus, which delivers what is very nearly a second parabasis. There are no anapests, and hence the passage is not a parabasis in the strictest sense of the term, but we find an ode celebrating the new power of the birds, an epirrheme which puts a price on the head of Philocrates, the bird-seller, an antode extolling the happy life which the birds enjoy, and an antepirrheme advising the judges to award the victory to this comedy.

As soon as this has been delivered, Pithetaerus comes out of the thicket and announces that the sacrificial omens are propitious. A messenger arrives and reports that the walls have been completed, and subjoins an account of the ingenious methods by which the birds have solved the problems of construction. The general rejoicing evoked by this news is short-lived, for soon another messenger arrives, bearing the dreadful tidings that a god has eluded the sentries and slipped into the city; the militia has been called out and war seems imminent, when the god appears in person and turns out to be an astonished and unsuspecting Iris bearing a message from Zeus to the human race. She is rudely informed of the developments that have taken place, and the erotic threats of Pithetaerus send her tearfully on her way to report the news to the other immortals. Immediately after her departure a herald arrives from the earth and communicates to Pithetaerus the information that a bird-mania has become epidemic in Athens; Nephelococcygia has quite displaced Sparta in the affections of the discontented, and no less than ten thousand Athenians are on their way to settle in the new Utopia. Thus Pithetaerus is again forced to expel a number of irritating pests, and a parricide, who has heard that the mores of the birds approve of beating one's father, Cinesias, the dithyrambic poet, who longs to "gather fresh songs in the clouds, in the midst of the vapours and the fleecy snow," and an informer, who perceives the manifold advantages of wings in his profession, are rapidly and successively driven off with blows or threats. As soon as the last of this trio has departed, a furtive and masked figure slinks in, carrying an umbrella; its identity is finally revealed and Pithetaerus affectionately greets Prometheus, who, true to his traditional love of mankind and hatred of the gods, provides the founder of Nephelococcygia with preliminary information on the sad state of affairs which prevails amongst the Olympians, and with advice on how to handle the divine embassy which is on its way to conclude a treaty with the new and formidable city of the birds. The Chorus sings a brief ode and Pithetaerus commences the preparation of a splendid repast, when the Olympian delegation arrives, made up of Posidon, Heracles, and Triballus, a ridiculous and barbarous Thracian deity. "Oh! Democracy," exclaims the aristocratic Posidon, "whither, oh! whither are you leading us?" Pithetaerus demands that Zeus yield his sceptre to the birds and that Basileia, the personification of sovereignty, be given to him in marriage. Posidon gallantly refuses, but Heracles is immediately prejudiced in favour of Pithetaerus by the sight and the smell of the victuals he is preparing, and he easily forces or misinterprets Triballus into taking his side. The majority opinion thus enjoins complete capitulation to the requests of Pithetaerus, and the comedy ends with the *Hymenaeus* for his marriage to Basileia and Hosannas of praise in honour of the new lord of the universe.

Such is the plot of this beautiful and diversified comedy, a bright tissue of the purest and happiest fantasy, constructed with consummate skill, a song of unalloyed gaiety with never a false or bitter note. If its date had not been handed down to us, surely no one would suspect that it was written under the shadow of the impending Athenian débâcle in Sicily and only a year after the mutilation of the Hermae with its resultant psychoses of superstitious fear and savage vindictiveness. Only an isolated and ambiguous reference to the recall of Alcibiades suggests contemporary events; the rest of the play is written not for the year 414 but almost for the period of 459-404. This approach to timelessness is at once an explanation of why *The Birds* did not win the first prize, a foreshadowing of the New Comedy, and a testimony to the fact that forms of art develop in opposition, not in response, to the popular taste.

## THE BIRDS

(SCENE:—*A wild and desolate region; only thickets, rocks, and a single tree are seen. EUELPIDES and PITHETAERUS enter, each with a bird in his hand.*)

EUELPIDES (*to his jay*)

Do you think I should walk straight for yon tree?

PITHETAERUS (*to his crow*)

Cursed beast, what are you croaking to me? . . . to retrace my steps?

EUELPIDES

Why, you wretch, we are wandering at random, we are exerting ourselves only to return to the same spot; we're wasting our time.

PITHETAERUS

To think that I should trust to this crow, which has made me cover more than a thousand furlongs!

EUELPIDES

And that I, in obedience to this jay, should have worn my toes down to the nails!

PITHETAERUS

If only I knew where we were. . . .

EUELPIDES

Could you find your country again from here?

PITHETAERUS

No, I feel quite sure I could not, any more than could Exceestides find his.

EUELPIDES

Alas!

PITHETAERUS

Aye, aye, my friend, it's surely the road of "alases" we are following.

EUELPIDES

That Philocrates, the bird-seller, played us a scurvy trick, when he pretended these two guides could help us to find Tereus, the Epops, who is a bird, without being born of one. He has indeed sold us this jay, a true son of Tharrhelides, for an obolus, and this crow for three, but what can they do? Why, nothing whatever but bite and scratch! (*To his jay*) What's the matter with you then, that you keep opening your beak? Do you want us to fling ourselves headlong down these rocks? There is no road that way.

PITHETAERUS

Not even the vestige of a trail in any direction

EUELPIDES

And what does the crow say about the road to follow?

PITHETAERUS

By Zeus, it no longer croaks the same thing it did.

EUELPIDES

And which way does it tell us to go now?

PITHETAERUS

It says that, by dint of gnawing, it will devour my fingers.

EUELPIDES

What misfortune is ours! we strain every nerve to get to the crows, do everything we can to that end, and we cannot find our way! Yes, spectators, our madness is quite different from that of Sacas. He is not a citizen, and would fain be one at any cost; we, on the contrary, born of an honourable tribe and family and living in the midst of our fellow-citizens, we have fled from our country as hard as ever we could go. It's not that we hate it; we recognize it to be great and rich, likewise that everyone has the right to ruin himself paying taxes; but the crickets only chirrup among the fig-trees for a month or two, whereas the Athenians spend their whole lives in chanting forth judgments from their law-courts. That is why we started off with a basket, a stew-pot and some myrtle boughs <sup>1</sup> and have come to seek a quiet country in which to settle. We are going to Tereus, the Epops, to learn from him, whether, in his aerial flights, he has noticed some town of this kind.

PITHETAERUS

Here! look!



EUELPIDES

What's the matter?

PITHETAERUS

Why, the crow has been directing me to something up there for some time now.

EUELPIDES

And the jay is also opening its beak and craning its neck to show me I know not what. Clearly, there are some birds about here. We shall soon know, if we kick up a noise to start them.

PITHETAERUS

Do you know what to do? Knock your leg against this rock.

EUELPIDES

And you your head to double the noise.

PITHETAERUS

Well then use a stone instead, take one and hammer with it.

EUELPIDES

Good idea! (*He does so.*) Ho there, within! Slave! slave!

PITHETAERUS

What's that, friend! You say, "slave," to summon Epops? It would be much better to shout, "Epops, Epops!"

EUELPIDES

Well then, Epops! Must I knock again? Epops!

TROCHILUS (*rushing out of a thicket*)

Who's there? Who calls my master?

PITHETAERUS (*in terror*)

Apollo the Deliverer! what an enormous beak!  
(*He defecates. In the confusion both the jay and the crow fly away.*)

TROCHILUS (*equally frightened*)

Good god! they are bird-catchers.

EUELPIDES (*reassuring himself*)

But is it so terrible? Wouldn't it be better to explain things?

TROCHILUS (*also reassuring himself*)

You're done for.

EUELPIDES

But we are not men.

TROCHILUS

What are you, then?

EUELPIDES (*defecating also*)

I am the Fearling, an African bird.

TROCHILUS

You talk nonsense.

EUELPIDES

Well, then, just ask it of my feet.

TROCHILUS

And this other one, what bird is it? (*To PITHETAEUS*) Speak up!

PITHETAEUS (*weakly*)

I? I am a Crapple, from the land of the pheasants.

EUELPIDES

But you yourself, in the name of the gods! what animal are you?

TROCHILUS

Why, I am a slave-bird.

EUELPIDES

Why, have you been conquered by a cock?

TROCHILUS

No, but when my master was turned into a hoopoe, he begged me to become a bird also, to follow and to serve him.

EUELPIDES

Does a bird need a servant, then?

TROCHILUS

That's no doubt because he was once a man. At times he wants to eat a dish of sardines from Phalerum; I seize my dish and fly to fetch him some. Again he wants some pea-soup; I seize a ladle and a pot and run to get it.

EUELPIDES

This is, then, truly a running-bird. Come, Trochilus, do us the kindness to call your master.

## TROCHILUS

Why, he has just fallen asleep after a feed of myrtle-berries and a few grubs.

## EUELPIDES

Never mind; wake him up.

## TROCHILUS

I am certain he will be angry. However, I will wake him to please you.  
(*He goes back into the thicket.*)

PITHETAERUS (*as soon as TROCHILUS is out of sight*)  
You cursed brute! why, I am almost dead with terror!

## EUELPIDES

Oh! my god! it was sheer fear that made me lose my jay.

## PITHETAERUS

Ah! you big coward! were you so frightened that you let go your jay?

## EUELPIDES

And did you not lose your crow, when you fell sprawling on the ground?  
Tell me that.

## PITHETAERUS

Not at all.

## EUELPIDES

Where is it, then?

## PITHETAERUS

It flew away.

## EUELPIDES

And you did not let it go? Oh! you brave fellow!

EPOPS (*from within*)

Open the thicket, that I may go out!  
(*He comes out of the thicket.*)

## EUELPIDES

By Heracles! what a creature! what plumage! What means this triple crest?

## EPOPS

Who wants me?

EUELPIDES (*banteringly*)

The twelve great gods have used you ill, it seems.<sup>2</sup>

EPOPS

Are you twitting me about my feathers? I have been a man, strangers.

EUELPIDES

It's not you we are jeering at.

EPOPS

At what, then?

EUELPIDES

Why, it's your beak that looks so ridiculous to us.

EPOPS

This is how Sophocles outrages me in his tragedies. Know, I once was Tereus.

EUELPIDES

You were Tereus, and what are you now? a bird or a peacock? <sup>3</sup>

EPOPS

I am a bird.

EUELPIDES

Then where are your feathers? I don't see any.

EPOPS

They have fallen off.

EUELPIDES

Through illness?

EPOPS

No. All birds moult their feathers, you know, every winter, and others grow in their place. But tell me, who are you?

EUELPIDES

We? We are mortals.

EPOPS

From what country?

EUELPIDES

From the land of the beautiful galleys.<sup>4</sup>

## EPOPS

Are you dicasts?

## EUELPIDES

No, if anything, we are anti-dicasts.

## EPOPS

Is that kind of seed sown among you?

## EUELPIDES

You have to look hard to find even a little in our fields.

## EPOPS

What brings you here?

## EUELPIDES

We wish to pay you a visit.

## EPOPS

What for?

## EUELPIDES

Because you formerly were a man, like we are, formerly you had debts, as we have, formerly you did not want to pay them, like ourselves; furthermore, being turned into a bird, you have when flying seen all lands and seas. Thus you have all human knowledge as well as that of birds. And hence we have come to you to beg you to direct us to some cosy town, in which one can repose as if on thick coverlets.

## EPOPS

And are you looking for a greater city than Athens?

## EUELPIDES

No, not a greater, but one more pleasant to live in.

## EPOPS

Then you are looking for an aristocratic country.

## EUELPIDES

I? Not at all! I hold the son of Scellias in horror.

## EPOPS

But, after all, what sort of city *would* please you best?

## EUELPIDES

A place where the following would be the most important business transacted.—Some friend would come knocking at the door quite early in the morning saying, "By Olympian Zeus, be at my house early, as soon

as you have bathed, and bring your children too. I am giving a nuptial feast, so don't fail, or else don't cross my threshold when I am in distress."

EPOPS

Ah! that's what may be called being fond of hardships! (*To PITHETAERUS*) And what say you?

PITHETAERUS

My tastes are similar.

EPOPS

And they are?

PITHETAERUS

I want a town where the father of a handsome lad will stop in the street and say to me reproachfully as if I had failed him, "Ah! Is this well done, Stilbonides? You met my son coming from the bath after the gymnasium and you neither spoke to him, nor kissed him, nor took him with you, nor ever once felt his balls. Would anyone call you an old friend of mine?"

EPOPS

Ah! wag, I see you are fond of suffering. But there is a city of delights such as you want. It's on the Red Sea.

EUELPIDES

Oh, no. Not a sea-port, where some fine morning the Salaminian galley can appear, bringing a process-server along. Have you no Greek town you can propose to us?

EPOPS

Why not choose Lepreum in Elis for your settlement?

EUELPIDES

By Zeus! I could not look at Lepreum without disgust, because of Melanthius.

EPOPS

Then, again, there is the Opuntian Locris, where you could live.

EUELPIDES

I would not be Opuntian for a talent. But come, what is it like to live with the birds? You should know pretty well.

EPOPS

Why, it's not a disagreeable life. In the first place, one has no purse.

EUELPIDES

That does away with a lot of roguery.

EPOPS

For food the gardens yield us white sesame, myrtle-berries, poppies and mint.

EUELPIDES

Why, 'tis the life of the newly-wed indeed.

PITHETAERUS

Ha! I am beginning to see a great plan, which will transfer the supreme power to the birds, if you will but take my advice.

EPOPS

Take your advice? In what way?

PITHETAERUS

In what way? Well, firstly, do not fly in all directions with open beak; it is not dignified. Among us, when we see a thoughtless man, we ask, "What sort of bird is this?" and Teleas answers, "It's a man who has no brain, a bird that has lost his head, a creature you cannot catch, for it never remains in any one place."

EPOPS

By Zeus himself! your jest hits the mark. What then is to be done?

PITHETAERUS

Found a city.

EPOPS

We birds? But what sort of city should we build?

PITHETAERUS

Oh, really, really! you talk like such a fool! Look down.

EPOPS

I am looking.

PITHETAERUS

Now look up.

EPOPS

I am looking.

PITHETAERUS

Turn your head round.

EPOPS

Ah! it will be pleasant for me if I end in twisting my neck off!

PITHETAERUS

What have you seen?

EPOPS

The clouds and the sky.

PITHETAERUS

Very well! is not this the pole of the birds then?

EPOPS

How their pole?

PITHETAERUS

Or, if you like it, their place. And since it turns and passes through the whole universe, it is called 'pole.' If you build and fortify it, you will turn your pole into a city.<sup>5</sup> In this way you will reign over mankind as you do over the grasshoppers and you will cause the gods to die of rabid hunger.

EPOPS

How so?

PITHETAERUS

The air is between earth and heaven. When we want to go to Delphi, we ask the Bocotians for leave of passage; in the same way, when men sacrifice to the gods, unless the latter pay you tribute, you exercise the right of every nation towards strangers and don't allow the smoke of the sacrifices to pass through your city and territory.

EPOPS

By earth! by snares! by network! by cages! <sup>6</sup> I never heard of anything more cleverly conceived; and, if the other birds approve, I am going to build the city along with you.

PITHETAERUS

Who will explain the matter to them?

EPOPS

You must yourself. Before I came they were quite ignorant, but since I have lived with them I have taught them to speak.

PITHETAERUS

But how can they be gathered together?



## EPOPS

Easily. I will hasten down to the thicket to waken my dear Procné and as soon as they hear our voices, they will come to us hot wing.

## PITHETAERUS

My dear bird, lose no time, please! Fly at once into the thicket and awaken Procné.

(EPOPS *rushes into the thicket.*)

EPOPS (*from within; singing*)

Chase off drowsy sleep, dear companion. Let the sacred hymn gush from thy divine throat in melodious strains; roll forth in soft cadence your refreshing melodies to bewail the fate of Itys, which has been the cause of so many tears to us both. Your pure notes rise through the thick leaves of the yew-tree right up to the throne of Zeus, where Phoebus listens to you, Phoebus with his golden hair. And his ivory lyre responds to your plaintive accents; he gathers the choir of the gods and from their immortal lips pours forth a sacred chant of blessed voices.

(*The flute is played behind the scene, imitating the song of the night-ingale.*)

## PITHETAERUS

Oh! by Zeus! what a throat that little bird possesses. He has filled the whole thicket with honey-sweet melody!

## EUELPIDES

Hush!

## PITHETAERUS

What's the matter?

## EUELPIDES

Be still!

## PITHETAERUS

What for?

## EUELPIDES

Epops is going to sing again.

EPOPS (*in the thicket, singing*)

*Epopopoi popoi popopopoi popoi*, here, here, quick, quick, quick, my comrades in the air; all you who pillage the fertile lands of the husbandmen, the numberless tribes who gather and devour the barley seeds, the swift flying race that sings so sweetly. And you whose

gentle twitter resounds through the fields with the little cry of *tiotio-tiotiotiotiotiotio*; and you who hop about the branches of the ivy in the gardens; the mountain birds, who feed on the wild olive-berries or the arbutus, hurry to come at my call, *trioto, trioto, toto**brix*; you also, who snap up the sharp-stinging gnats in the marshy vales, and you who dwell in the fine plain of Marathon, all damp with dew, and you, the francolin with speckled wings; you too, the halcyons, who flit over the swelling waves of the sea, come hither to hear the tidings; let all the tribes of long-necked birds assemble here; know that a clever old man has come to us, bringing an entirely new idea and proposing great reforms. Let all come to the debate here, here, here, here. *Torotorotorotorotix, kikkabau, kikkabau, torotorotoro-lililix*.

PITHETAERUS

Can you see any bird?

EUELPIDES

By Phoebus, no! and yet I am straining my eyesight to scan the sky.

PITHETAERUS

It was hardly worth Epops' while to go and bury himself in the thicket like a hatching plover.

A BIRD (*entering*)

*Torotix, torotix*.

PITHETAERUS

Wait, friend, there's a bird.

EUELPIDES

By Zeus, it *is* a bird, but what kind? Isn't it a peacock?

PITHETAERUS (*as EPOPS comes out of the thicket*)  
Epops will tell us. What is this bird?

EPOPS

It's not one of those you are used to seeing; it's a bird from the marshes.

EUELPIDES

Oh! oh! but he is very handsome with his wings as crimson as flame.

EPOPS

Undoubtedly; indeed he is called flamingo.

EUELPIDES (*excitedly*)

Hi! I say! You!

PITHETAERUS

What are you shouting for?

EUELPIDES

Why, here's another bird.

PITHETAERUS

Aye, indeed; this one's a foreign bird too. (*To EPOPS*) What is this bird from beyond the mountains with a look as solemn as it is stupid?

EPOPS

He is called the Mede.<sup>7</sup>

EUELPIDES

The Mede! But, by Heracles, how, if a Mede, has he flown here without a camel?

PITHETAERUS

Here's another bird with a crest.

(*From here on, the numerous birds that make up the CHORUS keep rushing in.*)

EUELPIDES

Ah! that's curious. I say, Epops, you are not the only one of your kind then?

EPOPS

This bird is the son of Philocles, who is the son of Epops; so that, you see, I am his grandfather; just as one might say, Hipponicus, the son of Callias, who is the son of Hipponicus.

EUELPIDES

Then this bird is Callias! Why, what a lot of his feathers he has lost!

EPOPS

That's because he is honest; so the informers set upon him and the women too pluck out his feathers.

EUELPIDES

By Posidon, do you see that many-coloured bird? What is his name?

EPOPS

This one? That's the glutton.

EUELPIDES

Is there another glutton besides Cleonymus? But why, if he is Cleonymus, has he not thrown away his crest? But what is the meaning of all

these crests? Have these birds come to contend for the double stadium prize? <sup>8</sup>

EPOPS

They are like the Carians, who cling to the crests of their mountains for greater safety.

PITHETAERUS

Oh, Posidon! look what awful swarms of birds are gathering here!

EUELPIDES

By Phoebus! what a cloud! The entrance to the stage is no longer visible so closely do they fly together.

PITHETAERUS

Here is the partridge.

EUELPIDES

Why, there is the francolin.

PITHETAERUS

There is the poachard.

EUELPIDES

Here is the kingfisher. (*To EPOPS*) What's that bird behind the kingfisher?

EPOPS

That's the barber.

EUELPIDES

What? a bird a barber?

PITHETAERUS

Why, Sporgilus is one.

EPOPS

Here comes the owl.

EUELPIDES

And who is it brings an owl to Athens? <sup>9</sup>

EPOPS (*pointing to the various species*)

Here is the magpie, the turtle-dove, the swallow, the horned-owl, the buzzard, the pigeon, the falcon, the ring-dove, the cuckoo, the red-foot, the red-cap, the purple-cap, the kestrel, the diver, the ousel, the osprey, the woodpecker . . .

PITHETAERUS

Oh! what a lot of birds!

EUELPIDES

Oh! what a lot of blackbirds!

PITHETAERUS

How they scold, how they come rushing up! What a noise! what a noise!

EUELPIDES

Can they be bearing us ill-will?

PITHETAERUS

Oh! there! there! they are opening their beaks and staring at us.

EUELPIDES

Why, so they are.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

*Popopopopopo*.<sup>10</sup> Where is he who called me? Where am I to find him?

EPOPS

I have been waiting for you a long while! I never fail in my word to my friends.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

*Titititititi*. What good news have you for me?

EPOPS

Something that concerns our common safety, and that is just as pleasant as it is to the point. Two men, who are subtle reasoners, have come here to seek me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Where? How? What are you saying?

EPOPS

I say, two old men have come from the abode of humans to propose a vast and splendid scheme to us.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! it's a horrible, unheard-of crime! What are you saying?

EPOPS

Never let my words scare you.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What have you done to me?

## EPOPS

I have welcomed two men, who wish to live with us.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And you have dared to do that!

## EPOPS

Yes, and I am delighted at having done so.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And are they already with us?

## EPOPS

Just as much as I am.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ah! ah! we are betrayed; 'tis sacrilege! Our friend, he who picked up corn-seeds in the same plains as ourselves, has violated our ancient laws; he has broken the oaths that bind all birds; he has laid a snare for me, he has handed us over to the attacks of that impious race which, throughout all time, has never ceased to war against us.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

As for this traitorous bird, we will decide his case later, but the two old men shall be punished forthwith; we are going to tear them to pieces.

## PITHETAERUS

It's all over with us.

## EUELPIDES

You are the sole cause of all our trouble. Why did you bring me from down yonder?

## PITHETAERUS

To have you with me.

## EUELPIDES

Say rather to have me melt into tears.

## PITHETAERUS

Go on! you are talking nonsense. How will you weep with your eyes pecked out?

CHORUS (*singing*)

*Io! io!* forward to the attack, throw yourselves upon the foe,  
spill his blood; take to your wings and surround them on all sides.  
Woe to them! let us get to work with our beaks, let us devour them.  
Nothing can save them from our wrath, neither the mountain forests,  
nor the clouds that float in the sky, nor the foaming deep.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, peck, tear to ribbons. Where is the chief of the cohort? Let him  
engage the right wing.

(*They rush at the two Athenians.*)

## EUELPIDES

This is the fatal moment. Where shall I fly to, unfortunate wretch that  
I am?

## PITHETAERUS

Wait! Stay here!

## EUELPIDES

That they may tear me to pieces?

## PITHETAERUS

And how do you think to escape them?

## EUELPIDES

I don't know at all.

## PITHETAERUS

Come, I will tell you. We must stop and fight them. Let us arm our-  
selves with these stew-pots.

## EUELPIDES

Why with the stew-pots?

## PITHETAERUS

The owl will not attack us then.<sup>11</sup>

## EUELPIDES

But do you see all those hooked claws?

## PITHETAERUS

Take the spit and pierce the foe on your side.

## EUELPIDES

And how about my eyes?

## PITHETAERUS

Protect them with this dish or this vinegar-pot.

## EUELPIDES

Oh! what cleverness! what inventive genius! You are a great general, even greater than Nicias, where stratagem is concerned.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Forward, forward, charge with your beaks! Come, no delay. Tear, pluck, strike, flay them, and first of all smash the stew-pot.

EPOPS (*stepping in front of the CHORUS*)

Oh, most cruel of all animals, why tear these two men to pieces, why kill them? What have they done to you? They belong to the same tribe, to the same family as my wife.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Are wolves to be spared? Are they not our most mortal foes? So let us punish them.

## EPOPS

If they are your foes by nature, they are your friends in heart, and they come here to give you useful advice.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Advice or a useful word from their lips, from them, the enemies of my forebears?

## EPOPS

The wise can often profit by the lessons of a foe, for caution is the mother of safety. It is just such a thing as one will not learn from a friend and which an enemy compels you to know. To begin with, it's the foe and not the friend that taught cities to build high walls, to equip long vessels of war; and it's this knowledge that protects our children, our slaves and our wealth.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Well then, I agree, let us first hear them, for that is best; one can even learn something in an enemy's school.

PITHETAERUS (*to EUELPIDES*)

Their wrath seems to cool. Draw back a little.

## EPOPS

It's only justice, and you will thank me later.



## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Never have we opposed your advice up to now.

## PITHETAERUS

They are in a more peaceful mood; put down your stew-pot and your two dishes; spit in hand, doing duty for a spear, let us mount guard inside the camp close to the pot and watch in our arsenal closely; for we must not fly.

## EUELPIDES

You are right. But where shall we be buried, if we die?

## PITHETAERUS

In the Ceramicus; for, to get a public funeral, we shall tell the Strategist that we fell at Orneae, fighting the country's foes.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Return to your ranks and lay down your courage beside your wrath as the hoplites do. Then let us ask these men who they are, whence they come, and with what intent. Here, Epops, answer me.

## EPOPS

Are you calling me? What do you want of me?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Who are they? From what country?

## EPOPS

Strangers, who have come from Greece, the land of the wise.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And what fate has led them hither to the land of the birds?

## EPOPS

Their love for you and their wish to share your kind of life; to dwell and remain with you always.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Indeed, and what are their plans?

## EPOPS

They are wonderful, incredible, unheard of.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why, do they think to see some advantage that determines them to settle here? Are they hoping with our help to triumph over their foes or to be useful to their friends?

## EPOPS

They speak of benefits so great it is impossible either to describe or conceive them; all shall be yours, all that we see here, there, above and below us; this they vouch for.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Are they mad?

## EPOPS

They are the sanest people in the world.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Clever men?

## EPOPS

The slyest of foxes, cleverness its very self, men of the world, cunning, the cream of knowing folk.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Tell them to speak and speak quickly; why, as I listen to you, I am beside myself with delight.

EPOPS (*to two attendants*)

Here, you there, take all these weapons and hang them up inside close to the fire, near the figure of the god who presides there and under his protection; (*to PITHETAERUS*) as for you, address the birds, tell them why I have gathered them together.

## PITHETAERUS

Not I, by Apollo, unless they agree with me as the little ape of an armourer agreed with his wife, not to bite me, nor pull me by the balls, nor shove things into my . . .

EUELPIDES (*bending over and pointing his finger at his anus*)

Do you mean this?

## PITHETAERUS

No, I mean my eyes.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Agreed.

## PITHETAERUS

Swear it.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I swear it and, if I keep my promise, let judges and spectators give me the victory unanimously.

## PITHETAERUS

It is a bargain.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And if I break my word, may I succeed by one vote only.

EPOPS (*as* HERALD)

Hearken, ye people! Hoplites, pick up your weapons and return to your firesides; do not fail to read the decrees of dismissal we have posted.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Man is a truly cunning creature, but nevertheless explain. Perhaps you are going to show me some good way to extend my power, some way that I have not had the wit to find out and which you have discovered. Speak! 'tis to your own interest as well as to mine, for if you secure me some advantage, I will surely share it with you.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But what object can have induced you to come among us? Speak boldly, for I shall not break the truce,—until you have told us all.

## PITHETAERUS

I am bursting with desire to speak; I have already mixed the dough of my address and nothing prevents me from kneading it. . . . Slave! bring the chaplet and water, which you must pour over my hands. Be quick!<sup>12</sup>

## EUELPIDES

Is it a question of feasting? What does it all mean?

## PITHETAERUS

By Zeus, no! but I am hunting for fine, tasty words to break down the hardness of their hearts. (*To the CHORUS*) I grieve so much for you, who at one time were kings . . .

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We kings? Over whom?

## PITHETAERUS

. . . of all that exists, firstly of me and of this man, even of Zeus himself. Your race is older than Saturn, the Titans and the Earth.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What, older than the Earth!

## PITHETAERUS

By Phoebus, yes.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

By Zeus, but I never knew that before!

## PITHETAERUS

That's because you are ignorant and heedless, and have never read your Aesop. He is the one who tells us that the lark was born before all other creatures, indeed before the Earth; his father died of sickness, but the Earth did not exist then; he remained unburied for five days, when the bird in its dilemma decided, for want of a better place, to entomb its father in its own head.

## EUELPIDES

So that the lark's father is buried at Cephalae.

## PITHETAERUS

Hence, if they existed before the Earth, before the gods, the kingship belongs to them by right of priority.

## EUELPIDES

Undoubtedly, but sharpen your beak well; Zeus won't be in a hurry to hand over his sceptre to the woodpecker.

## PITHETAERUS

It was not the gods, but the birds, who were formerly the masters and kings over men; of this I have a thousand proofs. First of all, I will point you to the cock, who governed the Persians before all other monarchs, before Darius and Megabazus. It's in memory of his reign that he is called the Persian bird.

## EUELPIDES

For this reason also, even to-day, he alone of all the birds wears his tiara straight on his head, like the Great King.

## PITHETAERUS

He was so strong, so great, so feared, that even now, on account of his ancient power, everyone jumps out of bed as soon as ever he crows at daybreak. Blacksmiths, potters, tanners, shoemakers, bathmen, corn-dealers, lyre-makers and armourers, all put on their shoes and go to work before it is daylight.

## EUCLIPIDES

I can tell you something about that. It was the cock's fault that I lost a splendid tunic of Phrygian wool. I was at a feast in town, given to celebrate the birth of a child; I had drunk pretty freely and had just fallen asleep, when a cock, I suppose in a greater hurry than the rest, began to crow. I thought it was dawn and set out for Halimus. I had hardly got beyond the walls, when a footpad struck me in the back with his bludgeon; down I went and wanted to shout, but he had already made off with my mantle.

## PITHETAERUS

Formerly also the kite was ruler and king over the Greeks.

## LEADER OF THE CITORUS

The Greeks?

## PITHETAERUS

And when he was king, he was the one who first taught them to fall on their knees before the kites.<sup>13</sup>

## EUCLIPIDES

By Zeus! that's what I did myself one day on seeing a kite; but at the moment I was on my knees, and leaning backwards with mouth agape, I bolted an obolus and was forced to carry my meal-sack home empty.<sup>14</sup>

## PITHETAERUS

The cuckoo was king of Egypt and of the whole of Phoenicia. When he called out "cuckoo," all the Phoenicians hurried to the fields to reap their wheat and their barley.

## EUCLIPIDES

Hence no doubt the proverb, "Cuckoo! cuckoo! go to the fields, ye circumcised."<sup>15</sup>

## PITHETAERUS

So powerful were the birds that the kings of Grecian cities, Agamemnon, Menelaus, for instance, carried a bird on the tip of their sceptres, who had his share of all presents.

## EUCLIPIDES

That I didn't know and was much astonished when I saw Priam come upon the stage in the tragedies with a bird, which kept watching Lysicrates to see if he got any present.

## PITHETAERUS

But the strongest proof of all is that Zeus, who now reigns, is represented as standing with an eagle on his head as a symbol of his royalty; his daughter has an owl, and Phoebus, as his servant, has a hawk.

## EUELPIDES

By Demeter, the point is well taken. But what are all these birds doing in heaven?

## PITHETAERUS

When anyone sacrifices and, according to the rite, offers the entrails to the gods, these birds take their share before Zeus. Formerly men always swore by the birds and never by the gods.

## EUELPIDES

And even now Lampon swears by the goose whenever he wishes to deceive someone.

## PITHETAERUS

Thus it is clear that you were once great and sacred, but now you are looked upon as slaves, as fools, as Maneses; stones are thrown at you as at raving madmen, even in holy places. A crowd of bird-catchers sets snares, traps, limed twigs and nets of all sorts for you; you are caught, you are sold in heaps and the buyers finger you over to be certain you are fat. Again, if they would but serve you up simply roasted; but they rasp cheese into a mixture of oil, vinegar and laserwort, to which another sweet and greasy sauce is added, and the whole is poured scalding hot over your back, for all the world as if you were diseased meat.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Man, your words have made my heart bleed; I have groaned over the treachery of our fathers, who knew not how to transmit to us the high rank they held from their forefathers. But 'tis a benevolent Genius, a happy Fate, that sends you to us; you shall be our deliverer and I place the destiny of my little ones and my own in your hands with every confidence.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But hasten to tell me what must be done; we should not be worthy to live, if we did not seek to regain our royalty by every possible means.

## PITHETAERUS

First I advise that the birds gather together in one city and that they build a wall of great bricks, like that at Babylon, round the plains of the air and the whole region of space that divides earth from heaven.

## EPOPS

Oh, Cebriones! oh, Porphyryon! what a terribly strong place!

## PITHETAEURUS

Then, when this has been well done and completed, you demand back the empire from Zeus; if he will not agree, if he refuses and does not at once confess himself beaten, you declare a sacred war against him and forbid the gods henceforward to pass through your country with their tools up, as hitherto, for the purpose of laying their Alcmenas, their Alopés, or their Semelés! if they try to pass through, you put rings on their tools so that they can't make love any longer. You send another messenger to mankind, who will proclaim to them that the birds are kings, that for the future they must first of all sacrifice to them, and only afterwards to the gods; that it is fitting to appoint to each deity the bird that has most in common with it. For instance, are they sacrificing to Aphrodité, let them at the same time offer barley to the coot; are they immolating a sheep to Posidon, let them consecrate wheat in honour of the duck; if a steer is being offered to Heracles, let honey-cakes be dedicated to the gull; if a goat is being slain for King Zeus, there is a King-Bird, the wren, to whom the sacrifice of a male gnat is due before Zeus himself even.<sup>16</sup>

## EUCLIPIDES

This notion of an immolated gnat delights me! And now let the great Zeus thunder!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But how will mankind recognize us as gods and not as jays? Us, who have wings and fly?

## PITHETAEURUS

You talk rubbish! Hermes is a god and has wings and flies, and so do many other gods. First of all, Victory flies with golden wings, Eros is undoubtedly winged too, and Iris is compared by Homer to a timorous dove.<sup>17</sup>

## EUCLIPIDES

But will not Zeus thunder and send his wingéd bolts against us?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If men in their blindness do not recognize us as gods and so continue to worship the dwellers in Olympus?

## PITHETAEURUS

Then a cloud of sparrows greedy for corn must descend upon their fields and eat up all their seeds; we shall see then if Demeter will mete them out any wheat.

EUELPIDES

By Zeus, she'll take good care she does not, and you will see her inventing a thousand excuses.

PITHIETAERUS

The crows too will prove your divinity to them by pecking out the eyes of their flocks and of their draught-oxen; and then let Apollo cure them, since he is a physician and is paid for the purpose.

EUELPIDES

Oh! don't do that! Wait first until I have sold my two young bullocks.

PITHIETAERUS

If on the other hand they recognize that you are God, the principle of life, that you are Earth, Saturn, Posidon, they shall be loaded with benefits.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Name me one of these then.

PITHIETAERUS

Firstly, the locusts shall not eat up their vine-blossoms; a legion of owls and kestrels will devour them. Moreover, the gnats and the gall-bugs shall no longer ravage the figs; a flock of thrushes shall swallow the whole host down to the very last.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And how shall we give wealth to mankind? This is their strongest passion.

PITHIETAERUS

When they consult the omens, you will point them to the richest mines, you will reveal the paying ventures to the diviner, and not another shipwreck will happen or sailor perish.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No more shall perish? How is that?

PITHIETAERUS

When the auguries are examined before starting on a voyage, some bird will not fail to say, "Don't start! there will be a storm," or else, "Go! you will make a most profitable venture."

EUELPIDES

I shall buy a trading-vessel and go to sea. I will not stay with you.



## PITHETAERUS

You will discover treasures to them, which were buried in former times, for you know them. Do not all men say, "None knows where my treasure lies, unless perchance it be some bird." <sup>18</sup>

## EUELPIDES

I shall sell my boat and buy a spade to unearth the vessels.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And how are we to give them health, which belongs to the gods?

## PITHETAERUS

If they are happy, is not that the chief thing towards health? The miserable man is never well.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Old Age also dwells in Olympus. How will they get at it? Must they die in early youth?

## PITHETAERUS

Why, the birds, by Zeus, will add three hundred years to their life.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

From whom will they take them?

## PITHETAERUS

From whom? Why, from themselves. Don't you know the cawing crow lives five times as long as a man?

## EUELPIDES

Ah! ah! these are far better kings for us than Zeus!

PITHETAERUS (*solemnly*)

Far better, are they not? And firstly, we shall not have to build them temples of hewn stone, closed with gates of gold; they will dwell amongst the bushes and in the thickets of green oak; the most venerated of birds will have no other temple than the foliage of the olive tree; we shall not go to Delphi or to Ammon to sacrifice; but standing erect in the midst of arbutus and wild olives and holding forth our hands filled with wheat and barley, we shall pray them to admit us to a share of the blessings they enjoy and shall at once obtain them for a few grains of wheat.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Old man, whom I detested, you are now to me the dearest of all; never shall I, if I can help it, fail to follow your advice.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Inspired by your words, I threaten my rivals the gods, and I swear that if you march in alliance with me against the gods and are faithful to our just, loyal and sacred bond, we shall soon have shattered their sceptre.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We shall charge ourselves with the performance of everything that requires force; that which demands thought and deliberation shall be yours to supply.

## EPOPS

By Zeus! it's no longer the time to delay and loiter like Nicias; let us act as promptly as possible. . . . In the first place, come, enter my nest built of brushwood and blades of straw, and tell me your names.

## PITHETAERUS

That is soon done; my name is Pithetaerus, and his, Euelpides, of the deme Crioia.

## EPOPS

Good! and good luck to you.

## PITHETAERUS

We accept the omen.

## EPOPS

Come in here.

## PITHETAERUS

Very well, you are the one who must lead us and introduce us.

## EPOPS

Come then.

(*He starts to fly away*)

PITHETAERUS (*stopping himself*)

Oh! my god! do come back here. Hi! tell us how we are to follow you. You can fly, but we cannot.

## EPOPS

Well, well.

## PITHETAERUS

Remember Aesop's fables. It is told there that the fox fared very badly, because he had made an alliance with the eagle.

## EPOPS

Be at ease. You shall eat a certain root and wings will grow on your shoulders.

## PITHETAERUS

Then let us enter. Xanthias and Manodorus, pick up our baggage.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hi! Epops! do you hear me?

## EPOPS

What's the matter?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Take them off to dine well and call your mate, the melodious Procné, whose songs are worthy of the Muses; she will delight our leisure moments.

## PITHETAERUS

Oh! I conjure you, accede to their wish; for this delightful bird will leave her rushes at the sound of your voice; for the sake of the gods, let her come here, so that we may contemplate the nightingale.

## EPOPS

Let it be as you desire. Come forth, Procné, show yourself to these strangers.

*(PROCNÉ appears; she resembles a young flute-girl.)*

## PITHETAERUS

Oh! great Zeus! what a beautiful little bird! what a dainty form! what brilliant plumage! Do you know how dearly I should like to get between her thighs?

## EUELPIDES

She is dazzling all over with gold, like a young girl.<sup>10</sup> Oh! how I should like to kiss her!

## PITHETAERUS

Why, wretched man, she has two little sharp points on her beak!

## EUELPIDES

I would treat her like an egg, the shell of which we remove before eating it; I would take off her mask and then kiss her pretty face.

## EPOPS

Let us go in.

## PITHIETÆRUS

Lead the way, and may success attend us.

(*EPOPS goes into the thicket, followed by PITHIETÆRUS and EUELPIDES.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Lovable golden bird, whom I cherish above all others, you, whom I associate with all my songs, nightingale, you have come, you have come, to show yourself to me and to charm me with your notes. Come, you, who play spring melodies upon the harmonious flute, lead off our anapests.

(*The CHORUS turns and faces the audience.*)

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Weak mortals, chained to the earth, creatures of clay as frail as the foliage of the woods, you unfortunate race, whose life is but darkness, as unreal as a shadow, the illusion of a dream, hearken to us, who are immortal beings, ethereal, ever young and occupied with eternal thoughts, for we shall teach you about all celestial matters; you shall know thoroughly what is the nature of the birds, what the origin of the gods, of the rivers, of Erebus, and Chaos; thanks to us, even Prodicus will envy you your knowledge.

At the beginning there was only Chaos, Night, dark Erebus, and deep Tartarus. Earth, the air and heaven had no existence. Firstly, black-winged Night laid a germless egg in the bosom of the infinite deeps of Erebus, and from this, after the revolution of long ages, sprang the graceful Eros with his glittering golden wings, swift as the whirlwinds of the tempest. He mated in deep Tartarus with dark Chaos, winged like himself, and thus hatched forth our race, which was the first to see the light. That of the Immortals did not exist until Eros had brought together all the ingredients of the world, and from their marriage Heaven, Ocean, Earth and the imperishable race of blessed gods sprang into being. Thus our origin is very much older than that of the dwellers in Olympus. We are the offspring of Eros; there are a thousand proofs to show it. We have wings and we lend assistance to lovers. How many handsome youths, who had sworn to remain insensible, have opened their thighs because of our power and have yielded themselves to their lovers when almost at the end of their youth, being led away by the gift of a quail, a waterfowl, a goose, or a cock.

And what important services do not the birds render to mortals! First of all, they mark the seasons for them, springtime, winter, and autumn. Does the screaming crane migrate to Libya,—it warns the husbandman to sow, the pilot to take his ease beside his tiller hung up in his dwelling, and Orestes to weave a tunic, so that the rigorous cold may not drive him any more to strip other folk. When the kite reappears, he tells of the return of

spring and of the period when the fleece of the sheep must be clipped. Is the swallow in sight? All hasten to sell their warm tunic and to buy some light clothing. We are your Ammon, Delphi, Dodona, your Phoebus Apollo. Before undertaking anything, whether a business transaction, a marriage, or the purchase of food, you consult the birds by reading the omens, and you give this name of omen <sup>20</sup> to all signs that tell of the future. With you a word is an omen, you call a sneeze an omen, a meeting an omen, an unknown sound an omen, a slave or an ass an omen. Is it not clear that we are a prophetic Apollo to you? (*More and more rapidly from here on.*) If you recognize us as gods, we shall be your divining Muses, through us you will know the winds and the seasons, summer, winter, and the temperate months. We shall not withdraw ourselves to the highest clouds like Zeus, but shall be among you and shall give to you and to your children and the children of your children, health and wealth, long life, peace, youth, laughter, songs and feasts; in short, you will all be so well off, that you will be weary and cloyed with enjoyment.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, rustic Muse of such varied note, *tiotiotiotiotinx*, I sing with you in the groves and on the mountain tops, *tiotiotinx*. I poured forth sacred strains from my golden throat in honour of the god Pan, *tiotiotinx*, from the top of the thickly leaved ash, and my voice mingles with the mighty choirs who extol Cybelé on the mountain tops, *totototototototinx*. 'Tis to our concerts that Phrynicus comes to pillage like a bee the ambrosia of his songs, the sweetness of which so charms the ear, *tiotiotinx*.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

If there is one of you spectators who wishes to spend the rest of his life quietly among the birds, let him come to us. All that is disgraceful and forbidden by law on earth is on the contrary honourable among us, the birds. For instance, among you it's a crime to beat your father, but with us it's an estimable deed; it's considered fine to run straight at your father and hit him, saying, "Come, lift your spur if you want to fight." The runaway slave, whom you brand, is only a spotted francolin with us. Are you Phrygian like Spintharus? Among us you would be the Phrygian bird, the goldfinch, of the race of Philemon. Are you a slave and a Carian like Execestides? Among us you can create yourself forefathers; <sup>21</sup> you can always find relations. Does the son of Pisias want to betray the gates of the city to the foe? Let him become a partridge, the fitting offspring of his father; among us there is no shame in escaping as cleverly as a partridge.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

So the swans on the banks of the Hebrus, *tiotiotiotiotinx*, mingle their voices to serenade Apollo, *tiotiotiotinx*, flapping their wings the while, *tiotiotiotinx*; their notes reach beyond the clouds of heaven; they startle the various tribes of the beasts; a windless sky calms the waves, *tototototototototinx*; all Olympus resounds, and astonishment seizes its rulers; the Olympian graces and Muses cry aloud the strain, *tiotiotiotinx*.

## LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

There is nothing more useful nor more pleasant than to have wings. To begin with, just let us suppose a spectator to be dying with hunger and to be weary of the choruses of the tragic poets; if he were winged, he would fly off, go home to dine and come back with his stomach filled. Some Patroclides, needing to take a crap, would not have to spill it out on his cloak, but could fly off, satisfy his requirements, let a few farts and, having recovered his breath, return. If one of you, it matters not who, had adulterous relations and saw the husband of his mistress in the seats of the senators, he might stretch his wings, fly to her, and, having laid her, resume his place. Is it not the most priceless gift of all, to be winged? Look at Diitrephes! His wings were only wicker-work ones, and yet he got himself chosen Phylarch and then Hipparch; from being nobody, he has risen to be famous; he's now the finest gilded cock of his tribe.

(PITHETAERUS and EUELPIDES *return; they now have wings.*)

## PITHETAERUS

Halloa! What's this? By Zeus! I never saw anything so funny in all my life.

## EUELPIDES

What makes you laugh?

## PITHETAERUS

Your little wings. D'you know what you look like? Like a goose painted by some dauber.

## EUELPIDES

And you look like a close-shaven blackbird.

## PITHETAERUS

We ourselves asked for this transformation, and, as Aeschylus has it, "These are no borrowed feathers, but truly our own."

## EPOPS

Come now, what must be done?

## PITHETAERUS

First give our city a great and famous name, then sacrifice to the gods.

## EUELPIDES

I think so too.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let's see. What shall our city be called?

## PITHETAERUS

Will you have a high-sounding Laconian name? Shall we call it Sparta?

## EUELPIDES

What! call my town Sparta? Why, I would not use *esparto* for my bed,<sup>22</sup> even though I had nothing but bands of rushes.

## PITHETAERUS

Well then, what name can you suggest?

## EUELPIDES

Some name borrowed from the clouds, from these lofty regions in which we dwell—in short, some well-known name.

## PITHETAERUS

Do you like Nephelococcygia?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! capital! truly that's a brilliant thought!

## EUELPIDES

Is it in Nephelococcygia that all the wealth of Theogenes and most of Aeschines' is?

## PITHETAERUS

No, it's rather the plain of Phlegra, where the gods withered the pride of the sons of the Earth with their shafts.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! what a splendid city! But what god shall be its patron? for whom shall we weave the peplus?

## EUELPIDES

Why not choose Athené Polias?

## PITHETAERUS

Oh! what a well-ordered town it would be to have a female deity armed from head to foot, while Clisthenes was spinning!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Who then shall guard the Pelargicon?

## PITHETAERUS

A bird.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

One of us? What kind of bird?

## PITHETAERUS

A bird of Persian strain, who is everywhere proclaimed to be the bravest of all, a true chick of Ares.

## EUELPIDES

Oh! noble chick!

## PITHETAERUS

Because he is a god well suited to live on the rocks. Come! into the air with you to help the workers who are building the wall; carry up rubble, strip yourself to mix the mortar, take up the hod, tumble down the ladder, if you like, post sentinels, keep the fire smouldering beneath the ashes, go round the walls, bell in hand, and go to sleep up there yourself; then despatch two heralds, one to the gods above, the other to mankind on earth and come back here.

## EUELPIDES

As for yourself, remain here, and may the plague take you for a troublesome fellow!

*(He departs.)*

## PITHETAERUS

Go, friend, go where I send you, for without you my orders cannot be obeyed. For myself, I want to sacrifice to the new god, and I am going to summon the priest who must preside at the ceremony. Slaves! slaves! bring forward the basket and the lustral water.

CHORUS (*singing*)

I do as you do, and I wish as you wish, and I implore you to address powerful and solemn prayers to the gods, and in addition to immolate a sheep as a token of our gratitude. Let us sing the Pythian chant in honour of the god, and let Chaeris accompany our voices.



PITHETAERUS (*to the flute-player*)

Enough! but, by Heracles! what is this? Great gods! I have seen many prodigious things, but I never saw a muzzled raven.<sup>23</sup> (*The PRIEST arrives.*) Priest! it's high time! Sacrifice to the new gods.

## PRIEST

I begin, but where is the man with the basket? <sup>24</sup> Pray to the Hestia of the birds, to the kite, who presides over the hearth, and to all the god and goddess-birds who dwell in Olympus . . .

## PITHETAERUS

Oh! Hawk, the sacred guardian of Sunium, oh, god of the storks!

## PRIEST

. . . to the swan of Delos, to Leto the mother of the quails, and to Artemis, the goldfinch . . .

## PITHETAERUS

It's no longer Artemis Colaenis, but Artemis the goldfinch.

## PRIEST

. . . to Bacchus, the finch and Cybelé, the ostrich and mother of the gods and mankind . . .

## PITHETAERUS

Oh! sovereign ostrich Cybelé, mother of Cleocritus!

## PRIEST

. . . to grant health and safety to the Nephelococcygians as well as to the dwellers in Chios . . .

## PITHETAERUS

The dwellers in Chios! Ah! I am delighted they should be thus mentioned on all occasions.

## PRIEST

. . . to the heroes, the birds, to the sons of heroes, to the porphyrion, the pelican, the spoon-bill, the redbreast, the grouse, the peacock, the horned-owl, the teal, the bittern, the heron, the stormy petrel, the fig-pecker, the titmouse . . .

## PITHETAERUS

Stop! stop! you drive me crazy with your endless list. Why, wretch, to what sacred feast are you inviting the vultures and the sea-eagles? Don't you see that a single kite could easily carry off the lot at once? Begone, you and your fillets and all; I shall know how to complete the sacrifice by myself.

(*The PRIEST departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

It is imperative that I sing another sacred chant for the rite of the lustral water, and that I invoke the immortals, or at least one of them, provided always that you have some suitable food to offer him; from what I see here, in the shape of gifts, there is naught whatever but horn and hair.

## PITHETAERUS

Let us address our sacrifices and our prayers to the winged gods.

(*A POET enters.*)

## POET

Oh, Muse! celebrate happy Nephelococcygia in your hymns.

## PITHETAERUS

What have we here? Where did you come from, tell me? Who are you?

## POET

I am he whose language is sweeter than honey, the zealous slave of the Muses, as Homer has it.

## PITHETAERUS

You a slave! and yet you wear your hair long?

## POET

No, but the fact is all we poets are the assiduous slaves of the Muses, according to Homer.

## PITHETAERUS

In truth your little cloak is quite holy too through zeal! But, poet, what ill wind drove you here?

## POET

I have composed verses in honour of your Nephelococcygia, a host of splendid dithyrambs and parthenia worthy of Simonides himself.

## PITHETAERUS

And when did you compose them? How long since?

## POET

Oh! 'tis long, aye, very long, that I have sung in honour of this city.

## PITHETAERUS

But I am only celebrating its foundation with this sacrifice; I have only just named it, as is done with little babies.

## POET

"Just as the chargers fly with the speed of the wind, so does the voice of the Muses take its flight. Oh! thou noble founder of the town of Aetna, thou, whose name recalls the holy sacrifices, make us such gift as thy generous heart shall suggest."

*(He puts out his hand.)*

## PITHETAERUS

He will drive us silly if we do not get rid of him by some present. (*To the PRIEST's acolyte*) Here! you, who have a fur as well as your tunic, take it off and give it to this clever poet. Come, take this fur; you look to me to be shivering with cold.

## POET

My Muse will gladly accept this gift; but engrave these verses of Pindar's on your mind.

## PITHETAERUS

Oh! what a pest! It's impossible then to get rid of him!

## POET

"Straton wanders among the Scythian nomads, but has no linen garment. He is sad at only wearing an animal's pelt and no tunic." Do you get what I mean?

## PITHETAERUS

I understand that you want me to offer you a tunic. Hi! you (*to the acolyte*), take off yours; we must help the poet. . . . Come, you, take it and get out.

## POET

I am going, and these are the verses that I address to this city: "Phoebus of the golden throne, celebrate this shivery, freezing city; I have travelled through fruitful and snow-covered plains. Tralalá! Tralalá!"

*(He departs)*

## PITHETAERUS

What are you chanting us about frosts? Thanks to the tunic, you no longer fear them. Ah! by Zeus! I could not have believed this cursed fellow could so soon have learnt the way to our city. (*To a slave*) Come, take the lustral water and circle the altar. Let all keep silence!

*(An ORACLE-MONGER enters.)*

## ORACLE-MONGER

Let not the goat be sacrificed.

PITHETAERUS

Who are you?

ORACLE-MONGER

Who am I? An oracle-monger.

PITHETAERUS

Get out!

ORACLE-MONGER

Wretched man, insult not sacred things. For there is an oracle of Bacis, which exactly applies to Nephelococcgia.

PITHETAERUS

Why did you not reveal it to me before I founded my city?

ORACLE-MONGER

The divine spirit was against it.

PITHETAERUS

Well, I suppose there's nothing to do but hear the terms of the oracle.

ORACLE-MONGER

"But when the wolves and the white crows shall dwell together between Corinth and Sicyon . . ."

PITHETAERUS

But how do the Corinthians concern me?

ORACLE-MONGER

It is the regions of the air that Bacis indicates in this manner "They must first sacrifice a white-fleeced goat to Pandora, and give the prophet who first reveals my words a good cloak and new sandals."

PITHETAERUS

Does it say sandals there?

ORACLE-MONGER

Look at the book. "And besides this a goblet of wine and a good share of the entrails of the victim."

PITHETAERUS

Of the entrails—does it say that?

ORACLE-MONGER

Look at the book. "If you do as I command, divine youth, you shall be an eagle among the clouds; if not, you shall be neither turtle-dove, nor eagle, nor woodpecker."

PITHETAERUS

Does it say all that?

ORACLE-MONGER

Look at the book.

PITHETAERUS

This oracle in no sort of way resembles the one Apollo dictated to me: "If an impostor comes without invitation to annoy you during the sacrifice and to demand a share of the victim, apply a stout stick to his ribs."

ORACLE-MONGER

You are drivelling.

PITHETAERUS

Look at the book. "And don't spare him, were he an eagle from out of the clouds, were it Lampon himself or the great Diopithes."

ORACLE-MONGER

Does it say that?

PITHETAERUS

Look at the book and go and hang yourself.

ORACLE-MONGER

Oh! unfortunate wretch that I am.

*(He departs.)*

PITHETAERUS

Away with you, and take your prophecies elsewhere.

*(Enter METON, with surveying instruments.)*

METON

I have come to you . . .

PITHETAERUS *(interrupting)*

Yet another pest! What have you come to do? What's your plan? What's the purpose of your journey? Why these splendid buskins? "

METON

I want to survey the plains of the air for you and to parcel them into lots.

PITHETAERUS

In the name of the gods, who are you?

METON

Who am I? Meton, known throughout Greece and at Colonus.

PITHETAERUS

What are these things?

METON

Tools for measuring the air. In truth, the spaces in the air have precisely the form of a furnace. With this bent ruler I draw a line from top to bottom; from one of its points I describe a circle with the compass. Do you understand?

PITHETAERUS

Not in the least.

METON

With the straight ruler I set to work to inscribe a square within this circle; in its centre will be the market-place, into which all the straight streets will lead, converging to this centre like a star, which, although only orbicular, sends forth its rays in a straight line from all sides.

PITHETAERUS

A regular Thales! Meton . . .

METON

What d'you want with me?

PITHETAERUS

I want to give you a proof of my friendship. Use your legs.

METON

Why, what have I to fear?

PITHETAERUS

It's the same here as in Sparta. Strangers are driven away, and blows rain down as thick as hail.

METON

Is there sedition in your city?

PITHETAERUS

No, certainly not.

METON

What's wrong then?

PITHETAERUS

We are agreed to sweep all quacks and impostors far from our borders.

METON

Then I'll be going.

PITHETAERUS

I'm afraid it's too late. The thunder grows already.

(*He beats him.*)

METON

Oh, woe! oh, woe!

PITHETAERUS

I warned you. Now, be off, and do your surveying somewhere else.

(*METON takes to his heels. He is no sooner gone than an INSPECTOR arrives.*)

INSPECTOR

Where are the Proxeni?

PITHETAERUS

Who is this Sardanapalus?

INSPECTOR

I have been appointed by lot to come to Nephelococcygia as inspector.

PITHETAERUS

An inspector! and who sends you here, you rascal?

INSPECTOR

A decree of Teleas.

PITHETAERUS

Will you just pocket your salary, do nothing, and get out?

INSPECTOR

Indeed I will; I am urgently needed to be at Athens to attend the Assembly; for I am charged with the interests of Pharnaces.

PITHETAERUS

Take it then, and get on your way. This is your salary.

(*He beats him.*)

INSPECTOR

What does this mean?

PITHETAERUS

This is the assembly where you have to defend Pharnaces.

INSPECTOR

You shall testify that they dare to strike me, the inspector.

PITHETAERUS

Are you not going to get out with your urns? <sup>26</sup> It's not to be believed; they send us inspectors before we have so much as paid sacrifice to the gods.

(*The INSPECTOR goes into hiding. A DEALER IN DECREES arrives.*)

DEALER IN DECREES (*reading*)

"If the Nephelococcygian does wrong to the Athenian . . ."

PITHETAERUS

What trouble now? What book is that?

DEALER IN DECREES

I am a dealer in decrees, and I have come here to sell you the new laws.

PITHETAERUS

Which?

DEALER IN DECREES

"The Nephelococcygians shall adopt the same weights, measures and decrees as the Olophyxians."

PITHETAERUS

And you shall soon be imitating the Ototyrians.

(*He beats him.*)

DEALER IN DECREES

Ow! what are you doing?

PITHETAERUS

Now will you get out of here with your decrees? For I am going to let you see some severe ones.

(*The DEALER IN DECREES departs; the INSPECTOR comes out of hiding.*)

INSPECTOR (*returning*)

I summon Pithetaerus for outrage for the month of Munychion.

PITHETAERUS

Ha! my friend! are you still here?

(*The DEALER IN DECREES also returns.*)

DEALER IN DECREES

"Should anyone drive away the magistrates and not receive them, according to the decree duly posted . . ."



## PITHETAERUS

What! rascal! you are back too?

(*He rushes at him.*)

## INSPECTOR

Woe to you! I'll have you condemned to a fine of ten thousand drachmae.

## PITHETAERUS

And I'll smash your urns.

## INSPECTOR

Do you recall that evening when you crapped on the column where the decrees are posted?

## PITHETAERUS

Here! here! let him be seized. (*The INSPECTOR runs off.*) Why, don't you want to stay any longer? But let us get indoors as quick as possible; we will sacrifice the goat inside.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Henceforth it is to me that mortals must address their sacrifices and their prayers. Nothing escapes my sight nor my might. My glance embraces the universe, I preserve the fruit in the flower by destroying the thousand kinds of voracious insects the soil produces, which attack the trees and feed on the germ when it has scarcely formed in the calyx; I destroy those who ravage the balmy terrace gardens like a deadly plague; all these gnawing crawling creatures perish beneath the lash of my wing.

## LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

I hear it proclaimed everywhere: "A talent for him who shall kill Diagoras of Melos, and a talent for him who destroys one of the dead tyrants." <sup>27</sup> We likewise wish to make our proclamation: "A talent to him among you who shall kill Philocrates, the Struthian; four, if he brings him to us alive. For this Philocrates skewers the finches together and sells them at the rate of an obolus for seven. He tortures the thrushes by blowing them out, so that they may look bigger, sticks their own feathers into the nostrils of blackbirds, and collects pigeons, which he shuts up and forces them, fastened in a net, to decoy others." That is what we wish to proclaim. And if anyone is keeping birds shut up in his yard, let him hasten to let them loose; those who disobey shall be seized by the birds and we shall put them in chains, so that in their turn they may decoy other men.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Happy indeed is the race of winged birds who need no cloak in winter! Neither do I fear the relentless rays of the fiery dog-days; when the divine grasshopper, intoxicated with the sunlight, as noon is burning the ground, is breaking out into shrill melody; my home is beneath the foliage in the flowery meadows. I winter in deep caverns, where I frolic with the mountain nymphs, while in spring I despoil the gardens of the Graces and gather the white, virgin berry on the myrtle bushes.

## LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

I want now to speak to the judges about the prize they are going to award; if they are favourable to us, we will load them with benefits far greater than those Paris received. Firstly, the owls of Laurium, which every judge desires above all things, shall never be wanting to you; you shall see them homing with you, building their nests in your money-bags and laying coins. Besides, you shall be housed like the gods, for we shall erect gables<sup>28</sup> over your dwellings; if you hold some public post and want to do a little pilfering, we will give you the sharp claws of a hawk. Are you dining in town, we will provide you with stomachs as capacious as a bird's crop. But, if your award is against us, don't fail to have metal covers fashioned for yourselves, like those they place over statues; else, look out! for the day you wear a white tunic all the birds will soil it with their droppings.

## PITHETAERUS

Birds! the sacrifice is propitious. But I see no messenger coming from the wall to tell us what is happening. Ah! here comes one running himself out of breath as though he were in the Olympic stadium.

MESSENGER (*running back and forth*)

Where, where, where is he? Where, where, where is he? Where, where, where is he? Where is Pithetaerus, our leader?

## PITHETAERUS

Here am I.

## MESSENGER

The wall is finished.

## PITHETAERUS

That's good news.

## MESSENGER

It's a most beautiful, a most magnificent work of art. The wall is so broad that Proxenides, the Braggartian, and Theogenes could pass each other in their chariots, even if they were drawn by steeds as big as the Trojan horse.

## PITHETAERUS

That's fine!

## MESSENGER

Its length is one hundred stadia; I measured it myself.

## PITHETAERUS

A decent length, by Posidon! And who built such a wall?

## MESSENGER

Birds—birds only; they had neither Egyptian brickmaker, nor stonemason, nor carpenter; the birds did it all themselves; I could hardly believe my eyes. Thirty thousand cranes came from Libya with a supply of stones, intended for the foundations. The water-rails chiselled them with their beaks. Ten thousand storks were busy making bricks; plovers and other water fowl carried water into the air.

## PITHETAERUS

And who carried the mortar?

## MESSENGER

Hérons, in hods.

## PITHETAERUS

But how could they put the mortar into the hods?

## MESSENGER

Oh! it was a truly clever invention; the geese used their feet like spades; they buried them in the pile of mortar and then emptied them into the hods.

## PITHETAERUS

Ah! to what use cannot feet be put? <sup>29</sup>

## MESSENGER

You should have seen how eagerly the ducks carried bricks. To complete the tale, the swallows came flying to the work, their beaks full of mortar and their trowels on their backs, just the way little children are carried.

## PITHETAERUS

Who would want paid servants after this? But tell me, who did the woodwork?

## MESSENGER

Birds again, and clever carpenters too, the pelicans, for they squared up the gates with their beaks in such a fashion that one would have thought they were using axes; the noise was just like a dockyard. Now the whole wall is tight everywhere, securely bolted and well guarded; it is patrolled, bell in hand; the sentinels stand everywhere and beacons burn on the towers. But I must run off to clean myself; the rest is your business.  
(*He departs.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to PITHETAERUS*)

Well! what do you say to it? Are you not astonished at the wall being completed so quickly?

## PITHETAERUS

By the gods, yes, and with good reason. It's really not to be believed. But here comes another messenger from the wall to bring us some further news! What a fighting look he has!

SECOND MESSENGER (*rushing in*)

Alas! alas! alas! alas! alas! alas!

## PITHETAERUS

What's the matter?

## SECOND MESSENGER

A horrible outrage has occurred; a god sent by Zeus has passed through our gates and has penetrated the realms of the air without the knowledge of the jays, who are on guard in the daytime.

## PITHETAERUS

It's a terrible and criminal deed. What god was it?

## SECOND MESSENGER

We don't know that. All we know is, that he has got wings.

## PITHETAERUS

Why were not patrolmen sent against him at once?

## SECOND MESSENGER

We have despatched thirty thousand hawks of the legion of Mounted Archers. All the hook-clawed birds are moving against him, the kestrel, the buzzard, the vulture, the great-horned owl; they cleave the air so that

it resounds with the flapping of their wings; they are looking everywhere for the god, who cannot be far away; indeed, if I mistake not, he is coming from yonder side.

## PITHETAERUS

To arms, all, with slings and bows! This way, all our soldiers; shoot and strike! Some one give me a sling!

CHORUS (*singing*)

War, a terrible war is breaking out between us and the gods! Come, let each one guard Air, the son of Erebus, in which the clouds float. Take care no immortal enters it without your knowledge.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Scan all sides with your glance. Hark! methinks I can hear the rustle of the swift wings of a god from heaven.

(*The Machine brings in IRIS, in the form of a young girl.*)

## PITHETAERUS

Hi! you woman! where, where, where are you flying to? Halt, don't stir! keep motionless! not a beat of your wing! (*She pauses in her flight.*) Who are you and from what country? You must say whence you come.

## IRIS

I come from the abode of the Olympian gods.

## PITHETAERUS

What's your name, ship or head-dress? <sup>30</sup>

## IRIS

I am swift Iris.

## PITHETAERUS

Paralus or Salaminia?

## IRIS

What do you mean?

## PITHETAERUS

Let a buzzard rush at her and seize her. <sup>31</sup>

## IRIS

Seize me? But what do all these insults mean?

## PITHETAERUS

Woe to you!

IRIS

I do not understand it.

PITHETAERUS

By which gate did you pass through the wall, wretched woman?

IRIS

By which *gate*? Why, great gods, I don't know.

PITHETAERUS

You hear how she holds us in derision. Did you present yourself to the officers in command of the jays? You don't answer. Have you a permit, bearing the seal of the storks?

IRIS

Am I dreaming?

PITHETAERUS

Did you get one?

IRIS

Are you mad?

PITHETAERUS

No head-bird gave you a safe-conduct?

IRIS

A safe-conduct to *me*. You poor fool!

PITHETAERUS

Ah! and so you slipped into this city on the sly and into these realms of air-land that don't belong to you.

IRIS

And what other roads can the gods travel?

PITHETAERUS

By Zeus! I know nothing about that, not I. But they won't pass this way. And you still dare to complain? Why, if you were treated according to your deserts, no Iris would ever have more justly suffered death.

IRIS

I am immortal.

PITHETAERUS

You would have died nevertheless.—Oh! that would be truly intolerable! What! should the universe obey us and the gods alone continue

their insolence and not understand that they must submit to the law of the strongest in their due turn? But tell me, where are you flying to?

IRIS

I? The messenger of Zeus to mankind, I am going to tell them to sacrifice sheep and oxen on the altars and to fill their streets with the rich smoke of burning fat.

PITHETAERUS

Of which gods are you speaking?

IRIS

Of which? Why, of ourselves, the gods of heaven.

PITHETAERUS

You, gods?

IRIS

Are there others then?

PITHETAERUS

Men now adore the birds as gods, and it's to them, by Zeus, that they must offer sacrifices, and not to Zeus at all!

IRIS (*in tragic style*)

Oh! fool! fool! Rouse not the wrath of the gods, for it is terrible indeed. Armed with the brand of Zeus, Justice would annihilate your race; the lightning would strike you as it did Licymnius and consume both your body and the porticos of your palace.

PITHETAERUS

Here! that's enough tall talk. Just you listen and keep quiet! Do you take me for a Lydian or a Phrygian and think to frighten me with your big words? Know, that if Zeus worries me again, I shall go at the head of my eagles, who are armed with lightning, and reduce his dwelling and that of Amphion to cinders. I shall send more than six hundred porphyry-ions clothed in leopards' skins up to heaven against him; and formerly a single Porphyryion gave him enough to do. As for you, his messenger, if you annoy me, I shall begin by getting between your thighs, and even though you are Iris, you will be surprised at the erection the old man can produce; it's three times as good as the ram on a ship's prow!

IRIS

May you perish, you wretch, you and your infamous words!

## PITHIETAERUS

Won't you get out of here quickly? Come, stretch your wings or look out for squalls!

## IRIS

If my father does not punish you for your insults . . .

*(The Machine takes IRIS away.)*

## PITHETAERUS

Ha! . . . but just you be off elsewhere to roast younger folk than us with your lightning.

CHORUS (*singing*)

We forbid the gods, the sons of Zeus, to pass through our city and the mortals to send them the smoke of their sacrifices by this road.

## PITHETAERUS

It's odd that the messenger we sent to the mortals has never returned.

*(The HERALD enters, wearing a golden garland on his head.)*

## HERALD

Oh! blessed Pithetaerus, very wise, very illustrious, very gracious, thrice happy, very . . . Come, prompt me, somebody, do

## PITHETAERUS

Get to your story!

## HERALD

All peoples are filled with admiration for your wisdom, and they award you this golden crown.

## PITHETAERUS

I accept it. But tell me, why do the people admire me?

## HERALD

Oh you, who have founded so illustrious a city in the air, you know not in what esteem men hold you and how many there are who burn with desire to dwell in it. Before your city was built, all men had a mania for Sparta; long hair and fasting were held in honour, men went dirty like Socrates and carried staves. Now all is changed. Firstly, as soon as it's dawn, they all spring out of bed together to go and seek their food, the same as you do; then they fly off towards the notices and finally devour the decrees. The bird-madness is so clear that many actually bear the names of birds. There is a halting victualler, who styles himself the partridge; Menippus calls himself the swallow; Opuntius the one-eyed crow;



Philocles the lark; Theogenes the fox-goose; Lycurgus the ibis; Chaerephon the bat; Syracosius the magpie; Midias the quail; indeed he looks like a quail that has been hit hard on the head. Out of love for the birds they repeat all the songs which concern the swallow, the teal, the goose or the pigeon; in each verse you see wings, or at all events a few feathers. This is what is happening down there. Finally, there are more than ten thousand folk who are coming here from earth to ask you for feathers and hooked claws; so, mind you supply yourself with wings for the immigrants.

## PITHETAERUS

Ah! by Zeus, there's no time for idling. (*To some slaves*) Go as quick as possible and fill every hamper, every basket you can find with wings. Manes will bring them to me outside the walls, where I will welcome those who present themselves.

CHORUS (*singing*)

This town will soon be inhabited by a crowd of men. Fortune favours us alone and thus they have fallen in love with our city.

PITHETAERUS (*to the slave MANES, who brings in a basket full of wings*)  
Come, hurry up and bring them along.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Will not man find here everything that can please him—wisdom, love, the divine Graces, the sweet face of gentle peace?

PITHETAERUS (*as MANES comes in with another basket*)  
Oh! you lazy servant! won't you hurry yourself?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Let a basket of wings be brought speedily. Come, beat him as I do, and put some life into him; he is as lazy as an ass.

## PITHETAERUS

Aye, Manes is a great craven.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Begin by putting this heap of wings in order; divide them in three parts according to the birds from whom they came; the singing, the prophetic and the aquatic birds; then you must take care to distribute them to the men according to their character.

PITHETAERUS (*to MANES, who is bringing in another basket*)  
Oh! by the kestrels! I can keep my hands off you no longer; you are too slow and lazy altogether.

(*He hits MANES, who runs away. A young PARRICIDE enters.*)

PARRICIDE (*singing*)

Oh! might I but become an eagle, who soars in the skies! Oh!  
might I fly above the azure waves of the barren sea!

## PITHETAERUS

Ha! it would seem the news was true; I hear someone coming who talks  
of wings.

## PARRICIDE

Nothing is more charming than to fly; I am bird-mad and fly towards  
you, for I want to live with you and to obey your laws.

## PITHETAERUS

Which laws? The birds have many laws.

## PARRICIDE

All of them; but the one that pleases me most is that among the birds  
it is considered a fine thing to peck and strangle one's father.

## PITHETAERUS

Yes, by Zeus! according to us, he who dares to strike his father, while  
still a chick, is a brave fellow.

## PARRICIDE

And therefore I want to dwell here, for I want to strangle my father  
and inherit his wealth.

## PITHETAERUS

But we have also an ancient law written in the code of the storks, which  
runs thus, "When the stork father has reared his young and has taught  
them to fly, the young must in their turn support the father."

PARRICIDE (*petulantly*)

It's hardly worth while coming all this distance to be compelled to  
keep my father!

## PITHETAERUS

No, no, young friend, since you have come to us with such willingness,  
I am going to give you these black wings, as though you were an orphan  
bird; furthermore, some good advice, that I received myself in infancy.  
Don't strike your father, but take these wings in one hand and these  
spurs in the other; imagine you have a cock's crest on your head and go  
and mount guard and fight; live on your pay and respect your father's  
life. You're a gallant fellow! Very well, then! Fly to Thrace and fight.

## PARRICIDE

By Bacchus! You're right; I will follow your counsel.

## PITHETAERUS

It's acting wisely, by Zeus..

(*The PARRICIDE departs, and the dithyrambic poet CINESIAS arrives.*)

CINESIAS (*singing*)

"On my light pinions I soar off to Olympus; in its capricious flight my Muse flutters along the thousand paths of poetry in turn . . ."

## PITHETAERUS

This is a fellow will need a whole shipload of wings.

CINESIAS (*singing*)

". . . and being fearless and vigorous, it is seeking fresh outlet."

## PITHETAERUS

Welcome, Cinesias, you lime-wood man! Why have you come here twisting your game leg in circles?

CINESIAS (*singing*)

"I want to become a bird, a tuneful nightingale."

## PITHETAERUS

Enough of that sort of ditty. Tell me what you want.

## CINESIAS

Give me wings and I will fly into the topmost airs to gather fresh songs in the clouds, in the midst of the vapours and the fleecy snow.

## PITHETAERUS

Gather songs in the clouds?

## CINESIAS

'Tis on them the whole of our latter-day art depends. The most brilliant dithyrambs are those that flap their wings in empty space and are clothed in mist and dense obscurity. To appreciate this, just listen.

## PITHETAERUS

Oh! no, no, no!

## CINESIAS

By Hermes! but indeed you shall. (*He sings.*) "I shall travel through thine ethereal empire like a winged bird, who cleaveth space with his long neck . . ."

## PITHETAERUS

Stop! Way enough!

CINESIAS

" . . . as I soar over the seas, carried by the breath of the winds . . . "

PITHETAERUS

By Zeus! I'll cut your breath short.

(*He picks up a pair of wings and begins trying to stop CINESIAS' mouth with them.*)

CINESIAS (*running away*)

" . . . now rushing along the tracks of Notus, now nearing Boreas across the infinite wastes of the ether." Ah! old man, that's a pretty and clever idea truly!

PITHETAERUS

What! are you not delighted to be cleaving the air?

CINESIAS

To treat a dithyrambic poet, for whom the tribes dispute with each other, in this style! <sup>32</sup>

PITHETAERUS

Will you stay with us and form a chorus of winged birds as slender as Leotrophides for the Cecropid tribe?

CINESIAS

You are making game of me, that's clear; but know that I shall never leave you in peace if I do not have wings wherewith to traverse the air.  
(*CINESIAS departs and an INFORMER arrives.*)

INFORMER

What are these birds with downy feathers, who look so pitiable to me? Tell me, oh swallow with the long dappled wings.

PITHETAERUS

Oh! it's a regular invasion that threatens us. Here comes another one, humming along.

INFORMER

Swallow with the long dappled wings, once more I summon you.

PITHETAERUS

It's his cloak I believe he's addressing; it stands in great need of the swallows' return.

INFORMER

Where is he who gives out wings to all comers?

PITHETAERUS

Here I am, but you must tell me for what purpose you want them.

INFORMER

Ask no questions. I want wings, and wings I must have.

PITHETAERUS

Do you want to fly straight to Pellené?

INFORMER

I? Why, I am an accuser of the islands, an informer . . .

PITHETAERUS

A fine trade, truly!

INFORMER

. . . a hatcher of lawsuits. Hence I have great need of wings to prowl round the cities and drag them before justice.

PITHETAERUS

Would you do this better if you had wings?

INFORMER

No, but I should no longer fear the pirates, I should return with the cranes, loaded with a supply of lawsuits by way of ballast.

PITHETAERUS

So it seems, despite all your youthful vigour, you make it your trade to denounce strangers?

INFORMER

Well, and why not? I don't know how to dig.

PITHETAERUS

But, by Zeus! there are honest ways of gaining a living at your age without all this infamous trickery.

INFORMER

My friend, I am asking you for wings, not for words.

PITHETAERUS

It's just my words that gives you wings.

INFORMER

And how can you give a man wings with your words?

PITHETAERUS

They all start this way.

INFORMER

How?

PITHETAERUS

Have you not often heard the father say to young men in the barbers' shops, "It's astonishing how Diitrephes' advice has made my son fly to horse-riding."—"Mine," says another, "has flown towards tragic poetry on the wings of his imagination."

INFORMER

So that words give wings?

PITHETAERUS

Undoubtedly; words give wings to the mind and make a man soar to heaven. Thus I hope that my wise words will give you wings to fly to some less degrading trade.

INFORMER

But I do not want to.

PITHETAERUS

What do you reckon on doing then?

INFORMER

I won't belie my breeding; from generation to generation we have lived by informing. Quick, therefore, give me quickly some light, swift hawk or kestrel wings, so that I may summon the islanders, sustain the accusation here, and haste back there again on flying pinions.

PITHETAERUS

I see. In this way the stranger will be condemned even before he appears.

INFORMER

That's just it.

PITHETAERUS

And while he is on his way here by sea, you will be flying to the islands to despoil him of his property.

INFORMER

You've hit it, precisely; I must whirl hither and thither like a perfect humming-top.

PITHETAERUS

I catch the idea. Wait, I've got some fine Corcyraean wings. How do you like them?

INFORMER

Oh! woe is me! Why, it's a whip!

PITHIETAERUS

No, no; these are the wings, I tell you, that make the top spin.

INFORMER (*as PITHIETAERUS lashes him*)

Oh! oh! oh!

PITHIETAERUS

Take your flight, clear off, you miserable cur, or you will soon see what comes of quibbling and lying. (*The INFORMER flees. To his slaves*) Come, let us gather up our wings and withdraw.

(*The baskets are taken away.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

In my ethereal flights I have seen many things new and strange and wondrous beyond belief. There is a tree called Cleonymus belonging to an unknown species; it has no heart, is good for nothing and is as tall as it is cowardly. In springtime it shoots forth calumnies instead of buds and in autumn it strews the ground with bucklers in place of leaves.

Far away in the regions of darkness, where no ray of light ever enters, there is a country, where men sit at the table of the heroes and dwell with them always—except in the evening. Should any mortal meet the hero Orestes at night, he would soon be stripped and covered with blows from head to foot.

(*PROMETHEUS enters, masked to conceal his identity.*)

PROMETHEUS

Ah! by the gods! if only Zeus does not espy me! Where is Pithetaerus?

PITHIETAERUS

Ha! what is this? A masked man!

PROMETHEUS

Can you see any god behind me?

PITHIETAERUS

No, none. But who are you, pray?

PROMETHEUS

What's the time, please?

PITHIETAERUS

The time? Why, it's past noon. Who are you?

PROMETHEUS

Is it the fall of day? Is it no later than that?

PITHETAERUS

This is getting dull!

PROMETHEUS

What is Zeus doing? Is he dispersing the clouds or gathering them?

PITHETAERUS

Watch out for yourself!

PROMETHEUS

Come, I will raise my mask.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! my dear Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS

Sh! Sh! speak lower!

PITHETAERUS

Why, what's the matter, Prometheus?

PROMETHEUS

Sh! sh! Don't call me by my name; you will be my ruin, if Zeus should see me here. But, if you want me to tell you how things are going in heaven, take this umbrella and shield me, so that the gods don't see me.

PITHETAERUS

I can recognize Prometheus in this cunning trick. Come, quick then, and fear nothing; speak on.

PROMETHEUS

Then listen.

PITHETAERUS

I am listening, proceed!

PROMETHEUS

Zeus is done for.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! and since when, pray?

PROMETHEUS

Since you founded this city in the air. There is not a man who now sacrifices to the gods; the smoke of the victims no longer reaches us. Not



the smallest offering comes! We fast as though it were the festival of Demeter. The barbarian gods, who are dying of hunger, are bawling like Illyrians and threaten to make an armed descent upon Zeus, if he does not open markets where joints of the victims are sold.

PITHETAERUS

What! there are other gods besides you, barbarian gods who dwell above Olympus?

PROMETHEUS

If there were no barbarian gods, who would be the patron of Execestides?

PITHETAERUS

And what is the name of these gods?

PROMETHEUS

Their name? Why, the Triballi.

PITHETAERUS

Ah, indeed! 'tis from that no doubt that we derive the word 'tribulation.'<sup>33</sup>

PROMETHEUS

Most likely. But one thing I can tell you for certain, namely, that Zeus and the celestial Triballi are going to send deputies here to sue for peace. Now don't you treat with them, unless Zeus restores the sceptre to the birds and gives you Basileia in marriage.

PITHETAERUS

Who is this Basileia?

PROMETHEUS

A very fine young damsel, who makes the lightning for Zeus; all things come from her, wisdom, good laws, virtue, the fleet, calumnies, the public paymaster and the triobolus.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! then she is a sort of general manageress to the god.

PROMETHEUS

Yes, precisely. If he gives you her for your wife, yours will be the almighty power. That is what I have come to tell you; for you know my constant and habitual goodwill towards men.

PITHETAERUS

Oh, yes! it's thanks to you that we roast our meat.

PROMETHEUS

I hate the gods, as you know.

PITHETAERUS

Aye, by Zeus, you have always detested them.

PROMETHEUS

Towards them I am a veritable Timon; but I must return in all haste, so give me the umbrella; if Zeus should see me from up there, he would think I was escorting one of the Canephori.

PITHETAERUS

Wait, take this stool as well.

(PROMETHEUS *leaves*. PITHETAERUS *goes into the thicket*.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Near by the land of the Sciapodes there is a marsh, from the borders whereof the unwashed Socrates evokes the souls of men. Pisander came one day to see his soul, which he had left there when still alive. He offered a little victim, a camel, slit his throat and, following the example of Odysseus, stepped one pace backwards. Then that bat of a Chaerephon came up from hell to drink the camel's blood.

(POSIDON *enters, accompanied by HERACLES and TRIBALLUS*.)

POSIDON

This is the city of Nephelococcygia, to which we come as ambassadors. (To TRIBALLUS) Hi! what are you up to? you are throwing your cloak over the left shoulder. Come, fling it quick over the right! And why, pray, does it draggle in this fashion? Have you ulcers to hide like Læspodias? Oh! democracy! whither, oh! whither are you leading us? Is it possible that the gods have chosen such an envoy? You are undisturbed? Ugh! you cursed savage! you are by far the most barbarous of all the gods.—Tell me, Heracles, what are we going to do?

HERACLES

I have already told you that I want to strangle the fellow who dared to wall us out.

POSIDON

But, my friend, we are envoys of peace.

HERACLES

All the more reason why I wish to strangle him.

(PITHETAERUS *comes out of the thicket, followed by slaves, who are carrying various kitchen utensils; one of them sets up a table on which he places poultry dressed for roasting*.)

PITHETAERUS

Hand me the cheese-grater; bring me the silphium for sauce; pass me the cheese and watch the coals.

HERACLES

Mortal! we who greet you are three gods.

PITHETAERUS

Wait a bit till I have prepared my silphium pickle.

HERACLES

What are these meats?

PITHETAERUS

These are birds that have been punished with death for attacking the people's friends.

HERACLES

And you are going to season them before answering us?

PITHETAERUS (*looking up from his work for the first time*)  
Ah! Heracles! welcome, welcome! What's the matter?

POSIDON

The gods have sent us here as ambassadors to treat for peace.

PITHETAERUS (*ignoring this*)

There's no more oil in the flask.

HERACLES

And yet the birds must be thoroughly basted with it.

POSIDON

We have no interest to serve in fighting you; as for you, be friends and we promise that you shall always have rain-water in your pools and the warmest of warm weather. So far as these points go we are plenipotentiaries.

PITHETAERUS

We have never been the aggressors, and even now we are as well disposed for peace as yourselves, provided you agree to one equitable condition, namely, that Zeus yield his sceptre to the birds. If only this is agreed to, I invite the ambassadors to dinner.

HERACLES

That's good enough for me. I vote for peace.

POSIDON

You wretch! you are nothing but a fool and a glutton. Do you want to dethrone your own father?

PITHETAERUS

What an error. Why, the gods will be much more powerful if the birds govern the earth. At present the mortals are hidden beneath the clouds, escape your observation, and commit perjury in your name; but if you had the birds for your allies, and a man, after having sworn by the crow and Zeus, should fail to keep his oath, the crow would dive down upon him unawares and pluck out his eye.

POSIDON

Well thought of, by Posidon!

HERACLES

My notion too.

PITHETAERUS (*to TRIBALLUS*)

And you, what's your opinion?

TRIBALLUS

*Nabaisatreu.*<sup>34</sup>

PITHETAERUS

D'you see? he also approves. But listen, here is another thing in which we can serve you. If a man vows to offer a sacrifice to some god, and then procrastinates, pretending that the gods can wait, and thus does not keep his word, we shall punish his stinginess.

POSIDON

Ah! and how?

PITHETAERUS

While he is counting his money or is in the bath, a kite will relieve him, before he knows it, either in coin or in clothes, of the value of a couple of sheep, and carry it to the god.

HERACLES

I vote for restoring them the sceptre.

POSIDON

Ask Triballus.

HERACLES

Hi! Triballus, do you want a thrashing?

TRIBALLUS

Sure, bashum head withum stick.<sup>45</sup>

HERACLES

He says, "Right willingly."

POSIDON

If that be the opinion of both of you, why, I consent too.

HERACLES

Very well! we accord you the sceptre.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! I was nearly forgetting another condition. I will leave Heré to Zeus, but only if the young Basileia is given me in marriage.

POSIDON

Then you don't want peace. Let us withdraw.

PITHETAERUS

It matters mighty little to me. Cook, look to the gravy.

HERACLES

What an odd fellow this Posidon is! Where are you off to? Are we going to war about a woman?

POSIDON

What else is there to do?

HERACLES

What else? Why, conclude peace.

POSIDON

Oh! you blockhead! do you always want to be fooled? Why, you are seeking your own downfall. If Zeus were to die, after having yielded them the sovereignty, you would be ruined, for you are the heir of all the wealth he will leave behind.

PITHETAERUS

Oh! by the gods! how he is cajoling you. Step aside, that I may have a word with you. Your uncle is getting the better of you, my poor friend. The law will not allow you an obolus of the paternal property, for you are a bastard and not a legitimate child.

HERACLES

I a bastard! What's that you tell me?

## PITHETAERUS

Why, certainly; are you not born of a stranger woman? Besides, is not Athené recognized as Zeus' sole heiress? And no daughter would be that, if she had a legitimate brother.

## HERACLES

But what if my father wished to give me his property on his death-bed, even though I be a bastard?

## PITHETAERUS

The law forbids it, and this same Posidon would be the first to lay claim to his wealth, in virtue of being his legitimate brother. Listen; thus runs Solon's law: "A bastard shall not inherit, if there are legitimate children; and if there are no legitimate children, the property shall pass to the nearest kin."

## HERACLES

And I get nothing whatever of the paternal property?

## PITHETAERUS

Absolutely nothing. But tell me, has your father had you entered on the registers of his phratry?

## HERACLES

No, and I have long been surprised at the omission.

## PITHETAERUS

Why do you shake your fist at heaven? Do you want to fight? Why, be on my side, I will make you a king and will feed you on bird's milk and honey.

## HERACLES

Your further condition seems fair to me. I cede you the young damsel.

## POSIDON

But I, I vote against this opinion.

## PITHETAERUS

Then it all depends on the Triballus. (*To the TRIBALLUS*) What do you say?

## TRIBALLUS

Givum bird pretty gel bigum queen.

## HERACLES

He says give her.

## POSIDON

Why no, he does not say anything of the sort, or else, like the swallows he does not know how to walk.<sup>36</sup>

## PITHETAERUS

Exactly so. Does he not say she must be given to the swallows?

POSIDON (*resignedly*)

All right, you two arrange the matter; make peace, since you wish it so; I'll hold my tongue.

## HERACLES

We are of a mind to grant you all that you ask. But come up there with us to receive Basileia and the celestial bounty.

## PITHETAERUS

Here are birds already dressed, and very suitable for a nuptial feast.

## HERACLES

You go and, if you like, I will stay here to roast them.

## PITHETAERUS

You to roast them? you are too much the glutton; come along with us.

## HERACLES

Ah! how well I would have treated myself!

## PITHETAERUS

Let some one bring me a beautiful and magnificent tunic for the wedding.

(*The tunic is brought. PITHETAERUS and the three gods depart.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

At Phanæ, near the Clepsydra, there dwells a people who have neither faith nor law, the Englottogastors, who reap, sow, pluck the vines and the figs<sup>37</sup> with their tongues; they belong to a barbaric race, and among them the Philippi and the Gorgiases are to be found; 'tis these Englottogastorian Philippi who introduced the custom all over Africa of cutting out the tongue separately at sacrifices.

(A MESSENGER *enters*.)

MESSENGER (*in tragic style*)

Oh, you, whose unbounded happiness I cannot express in words, thrice happy race of airy birds, receive your king in your fortunate dwellings. More brilliant than the brightest star that illumines the earth, he is approaching his glittering golden palace; the sun itself does not shine with more dazzling glory. He is entering with his bride at his side, whose

beauty no human tongue can express; in his hand he brandishes the lightning, the winged shaft of Zeus; perfumes of unspeakable sweetness pervade the ethereal realms. 'Tis a glorious spectacle to see the clouds of incense wafting in light whirlwinds before the breath of the zephyr! But here he is himself. Divine Muse! let thy sacred lips begin with songs of happy omen.

(PITHETAERUS *enters, with a crown on his head; he is accompanied by* BASILEIA.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Fall back! to the right! to the left! advance! Fly around this happy mortal, whom Fortune loads with her blessings. Oh! oh! what grace! what beauty! Oh, marriage so auspicious for our city! All honour to this man! 'tis through him that the birds are called to such glorious destinies. Let your nuptial hymns, your nuptial songs, greet him and his Basileia! 'Twas in the midst of such festivities that the Fates formerly united Olympian Heré to the King who governs the gods from the summit of his inaccessible throne. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenæus! Rosy Eros with the golden wings held the reins and guided the chariot; 'twas he, who presided over the union of Zeus and the fortunate Heré. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenæus!

PITHETAERUS

I am delighted with your songs, I applaud your verses. Now celebrate the thunder that shakes the earth, the flaming lightning of Zeus and the terrible flashing thunderbolt.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, thou golden flash of the lightning! oh, ye divine shafts of flame, that Zeus has hitherto shot forth! Oh, ye rolling thunders, that bring down the rain! 'Tis by the order of *our* king that ye shall now stagger the earth! Oh, Hymen! 'tis through thee that he commands the universe and that he makes Basileia, whom he has robbed from Zeus, take her seat at his side. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenæus!

PITHETAERUS (*singing*)

Let all the winged tribes of our fellow-citizens follow the bridal couple to the palace of Zeus and to the nuptial couch! Stretch forth your hands, my dear wife! Take hold of me by my wings and let us dance; I am going to lift you up and carry you through the air.

(PITHETAERUS *and* BASILEIA *leave dancing; the* CHORUS *follows them.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

*Alalaí! Ië Paíón! Tenélla kálliníke!* Loftiest art thou of gods!



## NOTES FOR THE BIRDS

1. Myrtle boughs were part of the necessary paraphernalia of sacrifice, and this rite was an indispensable feature of the ceremonial founding of a city.

2. An extraordinarily felicitous or unfortunate experience was ascribed to the benevolence or the malignity of no less than a dozen divinities.

3. One naturally expects Euelpides to say, "a bird or a man?" Aristophanes makes frequent use of this humorous figure, for which the Greeks had the technical term *para prosdokian*, "contrary to expectation."

4. A reference to Athens' naval supremacy.

5. There is a pun here on the Greek words *polos*, "pole" and *polis*, "city."

6. Epops swears by all that he holds most terrible.

7. This scene, in which various birds appear and are identified, is an excellent example of the artistic restraint which characterizes Aristophanes' maturity. It is highly amusing to have the birds represent human beings and thus afford opportunities for personal jibes, but this device is much more amusing for not being carried out completely. No less than twenty-eight species are introduced, and although it would doubtless have been possible to connect all of these with human individuals or races, the resulting scene would have been too long for the essential humour of its theme.

8. In this event the competitors wore full armour and had to run the length of the track, round a mark at the end of it, and run back to the starting line.

9. The Athenian Acropolis was infested with owls. To bring owls to Athens was thus carrying coals to Newcastle.

10. In the Greek the *popopopopopo* runs right into the word *pou*, "where?" and the *titititititi* into *tina*, "what?" The effect is thus not merely birdlike, but also suggestive of a high pitch of excitement which causes the Leader of the Chorus to stutter. The second case could be rendered "t-t-t-t-t-t-tell me, etc." but the first seems quite untranslatable; there is nothing birdlike in "wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-where's the man who called me?"

11. A reference to the Feast of Pots, celebrated at Athens in honour of

Athené. The owl, an Athenian bird, will spare Pithetaerus and Euelpides when he recognizes their provenance by the stew-pots.

12. Since banqueters washed their hands before eating and wore chaplets at feasts, the suggestion is that the speech of Pithetaerus is to be something of a treat.

13. The appearance of the kite was a sign of Spring and was greeted with reverential actions.

14. Those in the ancient world who were too poor to afford a purse were wont to carry small coins in their mouths.

15. The origin and the meaning of this proverb are far from certain, but there is probably a play on two meanings of *psolos*, "circumcised" and "with erected penis." If the proverb was really current in Greece in this form it probably meant, "The cuckoo is here; time to stop making love and get to work." Euelpides then adapts it to the circumcised Egyptians and Phoenicians, in whose countries the cuckoo arrived at harvest time.

16. The connexions of these birds with the gods are various. The Greek word for coot is *phaleris*, which suggests the phallus. The duck lives in Posidon's realm. The gull is as voracious as Heracles. The wren was called *basilikos*, "little king" because of Aesop's fable, according to which the birds had agreed to choose as their king the one who could fly the highest; the eagle naturally was victorious in this competition, but when he had ascended as far as he could, the wren, who had concealed himself in his plumage, took off from his back and flew a bit higher.

17. This comparison is made of Iris and Ilithyia in the *Hymn to Apollo* (114) and of Hera and Athené in the *Iliad* (V, 778).

18. The usual form of this proverb is reported to have been, "No one can see me, except some bird."

19. Golden ornaments seem not to have been worn by matrons in the ancient world; the restriction to young girls probably went back to Homeric times.

20. The antiquity and the importance of divination by the actions of birds had made the Greek word *ornis*, "bird" the regular term for "omen."

21. A pun of the Greek word *pappas*, which normally means "grandfather," but is also the name of some kind of bird, we do not know just what kind.

22. The Greek word for esparto is *spartos*. The pun on Sparta is thus one of the few that can be translated.

23. The flute-player was costumed as a raven, but also wore the *phorbeia*, "a sort of leathern muzzle fitting closely round the piper's mouth on each side of the pipe. It was intended to make the breath flow more evenly through the instrument."

24. A regular feature of the sacrificial rite was a basket of cane containing the sacred paraphernalia.

25. Buskins were a standard part of the tragic costume; here they are mentioned as symbolic of Meton's pompous manner. It does not follow that he was wearing them.

26. These were the ancient ballot-boxes; the Inspector has brought them along in order immediately to set democracy going in Nephelococcygia.

27. A jibe at the groundless tyrannophobia of the Athenians. See note 12 on *The Wasps*.

28. There is a pun here on the two meanings of the Greek word *actos*, "eagle" and "gable."

29. An adaptation of the proverb, "To what use cannot hands be put?"

30. Iris must be visualized as speeding rapidly through the air with her robes flying like a ship's sails or the ribbons of a bonnet.

31. The buzzard is chosen with an eye to its name, *triorchos*, which also means "having three testicles."

32. A reference to the third of the Athenian choral competitions, in which dithyrambs were performed. Apparently each tribe supplied a chorus to compete in its name. Cinesias thus means that his talents are such that each tribe is eager to have him compose for and direct its chorus.

33. The pun here is hardly better in the Greek than in the translation; the word rendered "tribulation" is *epitribé*.

34. The word *nabaisatreu* is probably not designed to mean anything, but the first two letters suggest the Greek affirmative particles *ne* and *nai*, and this is all that Pithetaerus needs.

35. The broken Greek of Triballus seems here to be a threat in answer to that of Heracles, but its interpretation is very uncertain.

36. The meaning of Triballus' remark is wholly clear; the point of Posidon's, however, is undiscoverable.

37. A pun on the word *sykon*, "fig" and *sykophantes*, "informer." The etymology of the latter word is very obscure. The connexion with *sykon* seems obvious enough, but this does not help much.

VII  
LYSISTRATA

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

LYSISTRATA

CLEONICÉ

MYRRINÉ

LAMPITO

MAGISTRATES

CINESIAS

CHILD OF CINESIAS

HERALD OF THE LACEDÆMONIANS

ENVOYS OF THE LACEDÆMONIANS

AN ATHENIAN CITIZEN

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

CHORUS OF WOMEN

## INTRODUCTION

THREE years after the production of *The Birds*, Aristophanes brought out *Lysistrata* at the Lenaeian festival of 411. We have no information on the award of the prizes, and although it is difficult to imagine how a better comedy can have been produced on that occasion, we know enough of the unpredictable whims of Athenian popular taste to realize that Aristophanes may very well have been disappointed in the reception accorded one of his most excellent productions. Although the theme of the play classes it with *The Acharnians* and *Peace*, its atmosphere and treatment are radically different from those of its predecessors. The two earlier peace-plays are fantastic in detail but realistic in essence. In 425, Athens might have concluded a wise and profitable truce with Sparta, and in 421, it must have seemed that the trials and the tribulations of the war would soon be things of the past. In 411, however, Athens had her back against the wall and was fighting for her life; peace could have been obtained only by a surrender at once complete and disastrous. The pacific fantasy of *Lysistrata* is thus far more thoroughly divorced from contemporary realities than that of either *Peace* or *The Acharnians*, and in keeping with this the idealistic revery which it presents is panhellenic and Utopian to an extent which renders the play spiritually much more closely akin to *The Birds* and *The Ecclesiazusae* than to any of the earlier comedies. At the same time it looks to the future more clearly than any other play of Aristophanes that has come down to us, for its timelessness is almost equal to that of the New Comedy and far in excess of anything that we find in the Old. This should have made it in modern times the most popular of the poet's compositions, and the fact that it has not been so is a sad tribute to the omnipotence of Christian prudery, but the success of a not too emasculated adaptation produced in New York in 1930 might induce the true son of the twentieth century, who is also a philhellenist, to hope that his grandchildren may dwell in a clearer and healthier atmosphere.

As the play opens we see Lysistrata pacing up and down in front of her house, in a state of great excitement and annoyance. Her plans have been

carefully laid and the moment for action is at hand; the women of Athens have been sent to seize the Acropolis and female representatives of various other states in Greece have agreed to meet her here at this time; and they are not here. Finally they do arrive, and when all have assembled Lysistrata unfolds her plan. It is a magnificent and well-conceived scheme, whereby the women of Greece are to force their husbands to put an end to the war, by the simple expedient of refusing to lie with them. But its authoress has not adequately estimated the reluctance of the women to deprive themselves of corporeal delights. Like all revolutionary leaders, she is herself undersexed, and only the loyal support of the athletic Lam-pito, the delegate from hardy Sparta, prevents the cause from dying an ignoble and infant death. The other women ultimately steel their hearts and still their qualms, and an awful oath of celibacy is tearfully sworn over a bowl of wine.

A great commotion heard offstage testifies to the occupation of the Acropolis, and the revolution is now in full swing. Lysistrata and the other Athenians go to join their active countrywomen, while the delegates from abroad set out to incite similar insurrections in their respective cities. The scene shifts to the entrance of the Acropolis, and a group of old men, who constitute one of the two Choruses in the play, come slowly and painfully up the steep path, carrying faggots and logs and pots of fire. They intend to smoke the women out of the citadel, but meet with unexpected and effective resistance from a group of women who make up the other Chorus. Armed with pots of water and inspired by revolutionary zeal, they drench the old men and extinguish their fire. The first attempt at suppression has thus been successfully repulsed, but another difficulty now appears in the person of a magistrate accompanied by Scythian policemen. He orders his officers to force the gates and arrest Lysistrata, but the heroine forestalls this by coming out of the Acropolis voluntarily. The magistrate immediately orders his Scythians to seize her, but Lysistrata's cohorts rush at them so fiercely that they retire in trepidation and defecation. The cowardice of his officers thus compels the disappointed magistrate to shift from deeds to words, and Lysistrata eloquently expounds her plan and explains her actions. Her words are fruitless, of course, and the women turn to deeds, sousing the official with water and dressing him up like a corpse on the bier. He departs in towering and helpless wrath, to show his fellow magistrates the treatment he has received, and the victorious women retire into the Acropolis.

The stage is thus left to the two Choruses, and we expect them to co-operate in delivering a parabasis. The interlude which follows, however, is in substance merely an argument between the sexes, although it exhibits the formal features of ode and epirrheme. There are no anapæsts, and the passage is thus formally reminiscent of the second parabasis in

*The Birds*, with the difference that in the present instance each of the parts is found twice, because of the presence of two choruses.

Several days must be supposed to have elapsed during this interlude. At its conclusion Lysistrata steps forth from the Acropolis in deep anxiety and disillusionment, and we learn that she is experiencing the characteristic difficulties of a revolutionary leader. Initial enthusiasm has cooled, with the result that attempted defections are growing more and more numerous. Feminine frailty is becoming increasingly inadequate to the strain of living on the Acropolis with the owls and without the men. A series of instances of intended desertion now ensues; there is wool at home to be spread, and flax to be stripped, and the hooting of the owls is unbearable. The most ingenious of the women has slipped the sacred helmet of Pallas under her robe and asks Lysistrata's permission to go to the midwife, immediately. The revolution seems destined to fail in a very short time, but just at the moment when things look blackest the enemy shows signs of weakness, and Cinesias, the husband of one of Lysistrata's high command, named Myrrhiné, enters. The condition of his household is deplorable, but his own is patently worse, and Lysistrata instructs his wife to make the wretched man the fulcrum of the revolution's success. The obedient subordinate carries out her orders with fiendish thoroughness, tantalizing her husband beyond all human endurance, and finally leaving him much more tortured than he was before. The tide has now turned and the agonized enemy will soon capitulate. A herald arrives from Sparta, and his figure leaves no doubt that Lampito has been as effective as Lysistrata; "Are you a man or a Priapus?" asks the Athenian official who meets him, "or is that a lance you're hiding under your clothes?" Soon the envoys arrive and Lysistrata wisely reconciles the opposing parties; peace is made and the comedy ends in general rejoicing.

So far as the extant material enables us to judge, *Lysistrata* is the first comedy of Aristophanes in which women form the chorus or play any important rôle. Evidently the poet found this type of play enjoyable to write, for there are two others amongst the eleven in which the chorus or the principal characters are female. The feminine triad consistently exhibits Aristophanes' wit at its most brilliant best, but this is only what would be expected by anyone candid enough to recognize that the sexual phenomena of human life are the most copious sources of the finest humour. It is regrettable and thoroughly human that those persons to whom this fact needs to be pointed out are invariably unwilling or unable to accept it when it is pointed out; *Lysistrata* is not for them.



## LYSISTRATA

(SCENE:—*At the base of the Orchestra are two buildings, the house of LYSISTRATA and the entrance to the Acropolis; a winding and narrow path leads up to the latter. Between the two buildings is the opening of the Cave of Pan. LYSISTRATA is pacing up and down in front of her house.*)

LYSISTRATA

AH! if only they had been invited to a Bacchic revelling, or a feast of Pan or Aphrodité or Genetyllis, why! the streets would have been impassable for the thronging tambourines! Now there's never a woman here—ah! except my neighbour Cleonicé, whom I see approaching yonder. . . . Good day, Cleonicé.

CLEONICÉ

Good day, Lysistrata; but pray, why this dark, forbidding face, my dear? Believe me, you don't look a bit pretty with those black lowering brows.

LYSISTRATA

Oh, Cleonicé, my heart is on fire; I blush for our sex. Men *will* have it we are tricky and sly. . . .

CLEONICÉ

And they are quite right, upon my word!

LYSISTRATA

Yet, look you, when the women are summoned to meet for a matter of the greatest importance, they lie in bed instead of coming.

CLEONICÉ

Oh! they will come, my dear; but it's not easy, you know, for women to leave the house. One is busy pottering about her husband; another is getting the servant up; a third is putting her child asleep or washing the brat or feeding it.

LYSISTRATA

But I tell you, the business that calls them here is far and away more urgent.

CLEONICÉ

And why *do* you summon us, dear Lysistrata? What is it all about?

LYSISTRATA

About a big thing.

CLEONICÉ (*taking this in a different sense; with great interest*)  
And is it thick too?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, very thick

CLEONICÉ

And we are not all on the spot! Imagine!

LYSISTRATA (*warily*)

Oh! if it were what you suppose, there would be never an absentee. No, no, it concerns a thing I have turned about and about this way and that *so* many sleepless nights.

CLEONICÉ (*still unable to be serious*)

It must be something mighty fine and subtle for you to have turned it about so!

LYSISTRATA

So fine, it means just this, Greece saved by the women!

CLEONICÉ

By the women! Why, its salvation hangs on a poor thread then!

LYSISTRATA

Our country's fortunes depend on us—it is with us to undo utterly the Peloponnesians.

CLEONICÉ

That would be a noble deed truly!

LYSISTRATA

To exterminate the Boeotians to a man!

CLEONICÉ

But surely you would spare the eels.

## LYSISTRATA

For Athens' sake I will never threaten so fell a doom; trust me for that. However, if the Boeotian and Peloponnesian women join us, Greece is saved.

## CLEONICÉ

But how should women perform so wise and glorious an achievement, we women who dwell in the retirement of the household, clad in diaphanous garments of yellow silk and long flowing gowns, decked out with flowers and shod with dainty little slippers?

## LYSISTRATA

Ah, but those are the very sheet-anchors of our salvation—those yellow tunics, those scents and slippers, those cosmetics and transparent robes.

## CLEONICÉ

How so, pray?

## LYSISTRATA

There is not a man will wield a lance against another . . .

## CLEONICÉ

Quick, I will get me a yellow tunic from the dyer's.

## LYSISTRATA

. . . or want a shield.

## CLEONICÉ

I'll run and put on a flowing gown.

## LYSISTRATA

. . . or draw a sword.

## CLEONICÉ

I'll haste and buy a pair of slippers this instant.

## LYSISTRATA

Now tell me, would not the women have done best to come?

## CLEONICÉ

Why, they should have *flown* here!

## LYSISTRATA

Ah! my dear, you'll see that like true Athenians, they will do everything too late.<sup>1</sup> . . . Why, there's not a woman come from the shore, not one from Salamis.

CLEONICÉ

But I know for certain they embarked at daybreak.

LYSISTRATA

And the dames from Acharnae! why, I thought they would have been the very first to arrive.

CLEONICÉ

Theagenes' wife at any rate is sure to come; she has actually been to consult Hecaté. . . . But look! here are some arrivals—and there are more behind. Ah! ha! now what countrywomen may they be?

LYSISTRATA

They are from Anagyra.

CLEONICÉ

Yes! upon my word, 'tis a levy *en masse* of all the female population of Anagyra!

(MYRRHINÉ enters, followed by other women.)

MYRRHINÉ

Are we late, Lysistrata? Tell us, pray; what, not a word?

LYSISTRATA

I cannot say much for you, Myrrhiné! you have not bestirred yourself overmuch for an affair of such urgency.

MYRRHINÉ

I could not find my girdle in the dark. However, if the matter is so pressing, here we are; so speak.

CLEONICÉ

No, let's wait a moment more, till the women of Boeotia arrive and those from the Peloponnese.

LYSISTRATA

Yes, that is best. . . . Ah! here comes Lampito. (LAMPITO, a husky Spartan damsel, enters with three others, two from Boeotia and one from Corinth.) Good day, Lampito, dear friend from Lacedaemon. How well and handsome you look! what a rosy complexion! and how strong you seem; why, you could strangle a bull surely!

LAMPITO

Yes, indeed, I really think I could. It's because I do gymnastics and practise the bottom-kicking dance.

CLEONICÉ (*opening LAMPITO's robe and baring her bosom*)  
And what superb breasts!

LAMPITO  
La! you are feeling me as if I were a beast for sacrifice.

LYSISTRATA  
And this young woman, where is she from?

LAMPITO  
She is a noble lady from Boeotia.

LYSISTRATA  
Ah! my pretty Boeotian friend, you are as blooming as a garden.

CLEONICÉ (*making another inspection*)  
Yes, on my word! and her "garden" is so thoroughly weeded too!

LYSISTRATA (*pointing to the Corinthian*)  
And who is this?

LAMPITO  
'Tis an honest woman, by my faith! she comes from Corinth.

CLEONICÉ  
Oh! honest, no doubt then—as honesty goes at Corinth.

LAMPITO  
But who has called together this council of women, pray?

LYSISTRATA  
I have.

LAMPITO  
Well then, tell us what you want of us.

CLEONICÉ  
Yes, please tell us! What *is* this very important business you wish to inform us about?

LYSISTRATA  
I will tell you. But first answer me one question.

CLEONICÉ  
Anything you wish.

## LYSISTRATA

Don't you feel sad and sorry because the fathers of your children are far away from you with the army? For I'll wager there is not one of you whose husband is not abroad at this moment.

## CLEONICÉ

Mine has been the last five months in Thrace—looking after Eucrates.

## MYRRHINÉ

It's seven long months since mine left for Pylos.

## LAMPITO

As for mine, if he ever does return from service, he's no sooner home than he takes down his shield again and flies back to the wars.

## LYSISTRATA

And not so much as the shadow of a lover! Since the day the Milesians betrayed us, I have never once seen an eight-inch gadget even, to be a leathern consolation to us poor widows. . . . Now tell me, if I have discovered a means of ending the war, will you all second me?

## CLEONICÉ

Yes verily, by all the goddesses, I swear I will, though I have to put my gown in pawn, and drink the money the same day.<sup>2</sup>

## MYRRHINÉ

And so will I, though I must be split in two like a flat-fish, and have half myself removed.

## LAMPITO

And I too; why to secure peace, I would climb to the top of Mount Taygetus.

## LYSISTRATA

Then I will out with it at last, my mighty secret! Oh! sister women, if we would compel our husbands to make peace, we must refrain . . .

## CLEONICÉ

Refrain from what? tell us, tell us!

## LYSISTRATA

But will you do it?

## MYRRHINÉ

We will, we will, though we should die of it.

## LYSISTRATA

We must refrain from the male altogether. . . . Nay, why do you turn your backs on me? Where are you going? So, you bite your lips, and shake your heads, eh? Why these pale, sad looks? why these tears? Come, will you do it—yes or no? Do you hesitate?

## CLEONICÉ

I will not do it, let the war go on.

## MYRRHINÉ

Nor will I; let the war go on.

LYSISTRATA (*to MYRRHINÉ*)

And you say this, my pretty flat-fish, who declared just now they might split you in two?

## CLEONICÉ

Anything, anything but that! Bid me go through the fire, if you will; but to rob us of the sweetest thing in all the world, Lysistrata darling!

LYSISTRATA (*to MYRRHINÉ*)

And you?

## MYRRHINÉ

Yes, I agree with the others; I too would sooner go through the fire.

## LYSISTRATA

Oh, wanton, vicious sex! the poets have done well to make tragedies upon us; we are good for nothing then but love and lewdness! But you, my dear, you from hardy Sparta, if *you* join me, all may yet be well; help me, second me, I beg you.

## LAMPITO

'Tis a hard thing, by the two goddesses it is! for a woman to sleep alone without ever a strong male in her bed. But there, peace must come first.

## LYSISTRATA

Oh, my darling, my dearest, best friend, you are the only one deserving the name of woman!

## CLEONICÉ

But if—which the gods forbid—we do refrain altogether from what you say, should we get peace any sooner?

## LYSISTRATA

Of course we should, by the goddesses twain! We need only sit indoors with painted cheeks, and meet our mates lightly clad in transparent gowns of Amorgos silk, and perfectly depilated; they will get their tools up and be wild to lie with us. That will be the time to refuse, and they will hasten to make peace, I am convinced of that!

## LAMPITO

Yes, just as Menelaus, when he saw Helen's naked bosom, threw away his sword, they say.

## CLEONICÉ

But, oh dear, suppose our husbands go away and leave us.

## LYSISTRATA

Then, as Pherecrates says, we must "flay a skinned dog," that's all.

## CLEONICÉ

Fiddlesticks! these proverbs are all idle talk. . . . But if our husbands drag us by main force into the bedchamber?

## LYSISTRATA

Hold on to the door posts.

## CLEONICÉ

But if they beat us?

## LYSISTRATA

Then yield to their wishes, but with a bad grace; there is no pleasure in it for them, when they do it by force. Besides, there are a thousand ways of tormenting them. Never fear, they'll soon tire of the game; there's no satisfaction for a man, unless the woman shares it.

## CLEONICÉ

Very well, if you *must* have it so, we agree.

## LAMPITO

For ourselves, no doubt we shall persuade our husbands to conclude a fair and honest peace; but there is the Athenian populace, how are we to cure these folk of their warlike frenzy?

## LYSISTRATA

Have no fear; we undertake to make our own people listen to reason.

## LAMPITO

That's impossible, so long as they have their trusty ships and the vast treasures stored in the temple of Athené.



## LYSISTRATA

Ah! but we have seen to that; this very day the Acropolis will be in our hands. That is the task assigned to the older women; while we are here in council, they are going, under pretence of offering sacrifice, to seize the citadel.

## LAMPITO

Well said indeed! everything is going for the best.

## LYSISTRATA

Come, quick, Lampito, and let us bind ourselves by an inviolable oath.

## LAMPITO

Recite the terms; we will swear to them.

## LYSISTRATA

With pleasure. Where is our Scythian policewoman? Now, what are *you* staring at, pray? Lay this shield on the earth before us, its hollow upwards, and someone bring me the victim's inwards.

## CLEONICÉ

Lysistrata, say, what oath are we to swear?

## LYSISTRATA

What oath? Why, in Aeschylus, they sacrifice a sheep, and swear over a buckler; <sup>3</sup> we will do the same.

## CLEONICÉ

No, Lysistrata, one cannot swear peace over a *buckler*, surely.

## LYSISTRATA

What other oath do you prefer?

## CLEONICÉ

Let's take a white horse, and sacrifice it, and swear on its entrails.

## LYSISTRATA

But where shall we *get* a white horse?

## CLEONICÉ

Well, what oath shall we take then?

## LYSISTRATA

Listen to me. Let's set a great black bowl on the ground; let's sacrifice a skin of Thasian wine into it, and take oath not to add one single drop of water.

LAMPITO

Ah! that's an oath pleases me more than I can say.

LYSISTRATA

Let them bring me a bowl and a skin of wine.

CLEONICÉ

Ah! my dears, what a noble big bowl! what fun it will be to empty it!

LYSISTRATA

Set the bowl down on the ground, and lay your hands on the victim.  
. . . Almighty goddess, Persuasion, and thou, bowl, boon comrade of joy and merriment, receive this our sacrifice, and be propitious to us poor women!

CLEONICÉ (*as LYSISTRATA pours the wine into the bowl*)

Oh! the fine red blood! how well it flows!

LAMPITO

And what a delicious bouquet, by Castor!

CLEONICÉ

Now, my dears, let me swear first, if you please.

LYSISTRATA

No, by Aphrodité, unless it's decided by lot. But come, then, Lampito, and all of you, put your hands to the bowl; and do you, Cleonicé, repeat for all the rest the solemn terms I am going to recite. Then you must all swear, and pledge yourselves by the same promises,—*I will have naught to do whether with lover or husband . . .*

CLEONICÉ (*faintly*)

*I will have naught to do whether with lover or husband . . .*

LYSISTRATA

*Albeit he come to me with an erection . . .*

CLEONICÉ (*her voice quavering*)

*Albeit he came to me with an erection . . . (in despair)* Oh! Lysistrata, I cannot bear it!

LYSISTRATA (*ignoring this outburst*)

*I will live at home unbullied . . .*

CLEONICÉ

*I will live at home unbullied . . .*

## LYSISTRATA

*Beautifully dressed and wearing a saffron-coloured gown . . .*

## CLEONICÉ

*Beautifully dressed and wearing a saffron-coloured gown . . .*

## LYSISTRATA

*To the end I may inspire my husband with the most ardent longings.*

## CLEONICÉ

*To the end I may inspire my husband with the most ardent longings.*

## LYSISTRATA

*Never will I give myself voluntarily . . .*

## CLEONICÉ

*Never will I give myself voluntarily . . .*

## LYSISTRATA

*And if he has me by force . . .*

## CLEONICÉ

*And if he has me by force . . .*

## LYSISTRATA

*I will be cold as ice, and never stir a limb . . .*

## CLEONICÉ

*I will be cold as ice, and never stir a limb . . .*

## LYSISTRATA

*I will neither extend my Persian slippers toward the ceiling . . .*

## CLEONICÉ

*I will neither extend my Persian slippers toward the ceiling . . .*

## LYSISTRATA

*Nor will I crouch like the carven lions on a knife-handle.*

## CLEONICÉ

*Nor will I crouch like the carven lions on a knife-handle.*

## LYSISTRATA

*And if I keep my oath, may I be suffered to drink of this wine.*

CLEONICÉ (*more courageously*)

*And if I keep my oath, may I be suffered to drink of this wine.*

LYSISTRATA

*But if I break it, let my bowl be filled with water.*

CLEONICÉ

*But if I break it, let my bowl be filled with water.*

LYSISTRATA

Will you all take this oath?

ALL

We do.

LYSISTRATA

Then I'll now consume this remnant.

*(She drinks.)*

CLEONICÉ *(reaching for the cup)*

Enough, enough, my dear; now let us all drink in turn to cement our friendship.

*(They pass the cup around and all drink. A great commotion is heard off stage.)*

LAMPITO

Listen! what do those cries mean?

LYSISTRATA

It's what I was telling you; the women have just occupied the Acropolis. So now, Lampito, you return to Sparta to organize the plot, while your comrades here remain as hostages. For ourselves, let us go and join the rest in the citadel, and let us push the bolts well home.

CLEONICÉ

But don't you think the men will march up against us?

LYSISTRATA

I laugh at them. Neither threats nor flames shall force our doors; they shall open only on the conditions I have named.

CLEONICÉ

Yes, yes, by Aphrodité; otherwise we should be called cowardly and wretched women.

*(She follows LYSISTRATA out.)*

*(The scene shifts to the entrance of the Acropolis. The CHORUS OF OLD MEN slowly enters, carrying faggots and pots of fire.)*

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Go easy, Draces, go easy; why, your shoulder is all chafed by these damned heavy olive stocks. But forward still, forward, man, as needs must.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

What unlooked-for things do happen, to be sure, in a long life! Ah! Strymodorus, who would ever have thought it? Here we have the women, who used, for our misfortune, to eat our bread and live in our houses, daring nowadays to lay hands on the holy image of the goddess, to seize the Acropolis and draw bars and bolts to keep any from entering!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Come, Philurgus, man, let's hurry there; let's lay our faggots all about the citadel, and on the blazing pile burn with our hands these vile conspiratresses, one and all—and Lycon's wife first and foremost!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

Nay, by Demeter, never will I let them laugh at me, whiles I have a breath left in my body. Cleomenes himself, the first who ever seized our citadel, had to quit it to his sore dishonour; spite his Lacedaemonian pride, he had to deliver me up his arms and slink off with a single garment to his back. My word! but he was filthy and ragged! and what an unkempt beard, to be sure! He had not had a bath for six long years!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh! but that was a mighty siege! Our men were ranged seventeen deep before the gate, and never left their posts, even to sleep. These women, these enemies of Euripides and all the gods, shall I do nothing to hinder their inordinate insolence? else let them tear down my trophies of Marathon.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

But look, to finish this toilsome climb only this last steep bit is left to mount. Truly, it's no easy job without beasts of burden, and how these logs do bruise my shoulder! Still let us carry on, and blow up our fire and see it does not go out just as we reach our destination. Phew! phew! (*Blowing the fire*) Oh! dear! what a dreadful smoke!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

It bites my eyes like a mad dog. It is Lemnian fire for sure, or it would never devour my eyelids like this. Come on, Laches, let's

hurry, let's bring succour to the goddess; it's now or never! Phew! phew! (*Blowing the fire*) Oh dear! what a confounded smoke!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

There now, there's our fire all bright and burning, thank the gods! Now, why not first put down our loads here, then take a vine-branch, light it at the brazier and hurl it at the gate by way of battering-ram? If they don't answer our summons by pulling back the bolts, then we set fire to the woodwork, and the smoke will choke them. Ye gods! what a smoke! Pfaugh! Is there never a Samian general will help me unload my burden? —Ah! it shall not gall my shoulder any more. (*Setting down the wood*) Come, brazier, do your duty, make the embers flare, that I may kindle a brand; I want to be the first to hurl one. Aid me, heavenly Victory; let us punish for their insolent audacity the women who have seized our citadel, and may we raise a trophy of triumph for success! (*They begin to build a fire. The CHORUS OF WOMEN now enters, carrying pots of water.*)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Oh! my dears, methinks I see fire and smoke; can it be a conflagration? Let us hurry all we can.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

Fly, fly, Nicodicé, ere Calycé and Crityllé perish in the fire, or are stifled in the smoke raised by these accursed old men and their pitiless laws. But, great gods, can it be I come too late? Rising at dawn, I had the utmost trouble to fill this vessel at the fountain. Oh! what a crowd there was, and what a din! What a rattling of water-pots! Servants and slave-girls pushed and thronged me! However, here I have it full at last; and I am running to carry the water to my fellow-townswomen, whom our foes are plotting to burn alive.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

News has been brought us that a company of old, doddering grey-beards, loaded with enormous faggots, as if they wanted to heat a furnace, have taken the field, vomiting dreadful threats, crying that they must reduce to ashes these horrible women. Suffer them not, oh! goddess, but, of thy grace, may I see Athens and Greece cured of their warlike folly. 'Tis to this end, oh! thou guardian deity of our city, goddess of the golden crest, that they have seized thy sanctuary. Be their friend and ally, Athené, and if any man hurl against them lighted firebrands, aid us to carry water to extinguish them.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

What is this I see, ye wretched old men? Honest and pious folk ye cannot be who act so vilely.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah, ha! here's something new! a swarm of women stand posted outside to defend the gates!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Fart at us, would you? we seem a mighty host, yet you do not see the ten-thousandth part of our sex.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ho, Phaedrias! shall we stop their cackle? Suppose one of us were to break a stick across their backs, eh?

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Let us set down our water-pots on the ground, to be out of the way, if they should dare to offer us violence.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Let someone knock out two or three teeth for them, as they did to Bupalus; they won't talk so loud then.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Come on then; I wait you with unflinching foot, and no other bitch will ever grab your balls.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Silence! or my stick will cut short your days.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Now, just you dare to touch Stratyllis with the tip of your finger!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

And if I batter you to pieces with my fists, what will you do?

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I will tear out your lungs and entrails with my teeth.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh! what a clever poet is Euripides! how well he says that woman is the most shameless of animals.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Let's pick up our water-jars again, Rhodippé.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

You damned women, what do you mean to do here with your water?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

And you, old death-in-life, with your fire? Is it to cremate yourself?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

I am going to build you a pyre to roast your female friends upon.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

And I,—I am going to put out your fire.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

You put out my fire—*you*?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Yes, you shall soon see.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

I don't know what prevents me from roasting you with this torch.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I am getting you a bath ready to clean off the filth.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

A bath for *me*, you dirty slut?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Yes, indeed, a nuptial bath—tee hee!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*turning to his followers*)

Do you hear that? What insolence!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I am a free woman, I tell you.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

I will make you hold your tongue, never fear!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Ah ha! you shall never sit any more amongst the Heliasts.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*to his torch*)

Burn off her hair for her!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN (*to her pot*)

Achelous, do your duty!

(*The women pitch the water in their water-pots over the old men.*)



LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Was it hot?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Hot, great gods! Enough, enough!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I'm watering you, to make you bloom afresh.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Alas! I am too dry! Ah, me how! how I am trembling with cold!

(A MAGISTRATE enters, with a few Scythian policemen.)

MAGISTRATE

These women, have they made din enough, I wonder, with their tambourines? bewept Adonis enough upon their terraces? I was listening to the speeches last assembly day, and Demonstratus, whom heaven confound! was saying we must all go over to Sicily—and lo! his wife was dancing round repeating: "Alas! alas! Adonis, woe is me for Adonis!" Demonstratus was saying we must levy hoplites at Zacynthus—and there was his wife, more than half drunk, screaming on the house-roof: "Weep, weep for Adonis!"—while that infamous *Mad Ox* was bellowing away on his side.—Do you not blush, you women, for your wild and uproarious doings?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

But you don't know all their effrontery yet! They abused and insulted us; then soused us with the water in their water-pots, and have set us wringing out our clothes, for all the world as if we had bepossessed ourselves.

MAGISTRATE

And well done too, by Posidon! We men must share the blame of their ill conduct; it is we who teach them to love riot and dissoluteness and sow the seeds of wickedness in their hearts. You see a husband go into a shop: "Look you, jeweller," says he, "you remember the necklace you made for my wife. Well, the other evening, when she was dancing, the catch came open. Now, I am bound to start for Salamis; will you make it convenient to go up to-night to make her fastening secure?" Another will go to the cobbler, a great, strong fellow, with a great, long tool, and tell him: "The strap of one of my wife's sandals presses her little toe, which is extremely sensitive; come in about midday to supple the thing and stretch it." Now see the results. Take my own case—as a Magistrate

I have enlisted rowers; I want money to pay them, and the women slam the door in my face. But why do we stand here with arms crossed? Bring me a crowbar; *I'll chastise their insolence!*—Ho! there, my fine fellow! (*to one of the Scythians*) what are you gaping at the crows for? looking for a tavern, I suppose, eh? Come on, bring crowbars here, and force open the gates. I will put a hand to the work myself.

LYSISTRATA (*opening the gate and walking out*)

No need to force the gates; I am coming out—here I am. And why bolts and bars? What we want here is not bolts and bars and locks, but common sense.

MAGISTRATE (*jumping nervously, then striving manfully to regain his dignity*)

*Really*, my fine lady! Where is my officer? I want him to tie that woman's hands behind her back.

LYSISTRATA

By Artemis, the virgin goddess! if he touches me with the tip of his finger, officer of the public peace though he be, let him look out for himself!

(*The first Scythian defecates in terror*)

MAGISTRATE (*to another officer*)

How now, are you afraid? Seize her, I tell you, round the body. Two of you at her, and have done with it!

CLEONICÉ

By Pandrosos! if you lay a hand on her, I'll trample you underfoot till the crap comes out of you!

(*The second Scythian defecates in terror.*)

MAGISTRATE

Look at the mess you've made! Where is there another officer? (*To the third Scythian*) Bind *that* minx first, the one who speaks so prettily!

MYRRHINÉ

By Phoebé, if you touch her with one finger, you'd better call quick for a surgeon!

(*The third Scythian defecates in terror.*)

MAGISTRATE

What's that? Where's the officer? (*To the fourth Scythian*) Lay hold of her. Oh! but I'm going to stop your foolishness for you all!

## CLEONICÉ

By the Tauric Artemis, if you go near her, I'll pull out your hair, scream as you like.

*(The fourth Scythian defecates in terror.)*

## MAGISTRATE

Ah! miserable man that I am! My own officers desert me. What ho! are we to let ourselves be bested by a mob of women? Ho! Scythians mine, close up your ranks, and forward!

## LYSISTRATA

By the holy goddesses! you'll have to make acquaintance with four companies of women, ready for the fray and well armed to boot.

## MAGISTRATE

Forward, Scythians, and bind them!

*(The Scythians advance reluctantly.)*

## LYSISTRATA

Forward, my gallant companions; march forth, ye vendors of grain and eggs, garlic and vegetables, keepers of taverns and bakeries, wrench and strike and tear; come, a torrent of invective and insult! *(They beat the Scythians who retire in haste.)* Enough, enough! now retire, never rob the vanquished!

*(The women withdraw.)*

## MAGISTRATE

How unfortunate for my officers!

## LYSISTRATA

Ah, ha! so you thought you had only to do with a set of slave-women! you did not know the ardour that fills the bosom of free-born dames.

## MAGISTRATE

Ardour! yes, by Apollo, ardour enough—especially for the wine-cup!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Sir, sir! what good are words? they are of no avail with wild beasts of this sort. Don't you know how they have just washed us down—and with no very fragrant soap!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

What would you have? You should never have laid rash hands on us. If you start afresh, I'll knock your eyes out. My delight is to stay at home as coy as a young maid, without hurting anybody or moving any more than a milestone; but 'ware the wasps, if you go stirring up the wasps' nest!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

Ah! great gods! how get the better of these ferocious creatures? 'tis past all bearing! But come, let us try to find out the reason of the dreadful scourge. With what end in view have they seized the citadel of Cranaus, the sacred shrine that is raised upon the inaccessible rock of the Acropolis?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*to the* MAGISTRATE)

Question them; be cautious and not too credulous. It would be culpable negligence not to pierce the mystery, if we may.

MAGISTRATE (*addressing the women*)

I would ask you first why you have barred our gates.

## LYSISTRATA

To seize the treasury; no more money, no more war.

## MAGISTRATE

Then money is the cause of the war?

## LYSISTRATA

And of all our troubles. It was to find occasion to steal that Pisander and all the other agitators were forever raising revolutions. Well and good! but they'll never get another drachma here.

## MAGISTRATE

What do you propose to do then, pray?

## LYSISTRATA

You ask me that! Why, we propose to administer the treasury ourselves.

## MAGISTRATE

*You* do?

## LYSISTRATA

What is there in that to surprise you? Do we not administer the budget of household expenses?

## MAGISTRATE

But that is not the same thing.

## LYSISTRATA

How so—not the same thing?

## MAGISTRATE

It is the treasury supplies the expenses of the war.

LYSISTRATA

That's our first principle—no war!

MAGISTRATE

What! and the safety of the city?

LYSISTRATA

We will provide for that.

MAGISTRATE

*You?*

LYSISTRATA

Yes, *we!*

MAGISTRATE

What a sorry business!

LYSISTRATA

Yes, we're going to save you, whether you like it or not.

MAGISTRATE

Oh! the impudence of the creatures!

LYSISTRATA

You seem annoyed! but it has to be done, nevertheless.

MAGISTRATE

But it's the very height of iniquity!

LYSISTRATA (*testily*)

We're going to *save* you, my good man.

MAGISTRATE

But if I don't *want* to be saved?

LYSISTRATA

Why, all the more reason!

MAGISTRATE

But what a notion, to concern yourselves with questions of peace and war!

LYSISTRATA

We will explain our idea.

MAGISTRATE

Out with it then; quick, or . . . (*threatening her*).

LYSISTRATA (*sternly*)

Listen, and never a movement, please!

MAGISTRATE (*in impotent rage*)

Oh! it is too much for me! I cannot keep my temper!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Then look out for yourself; you have more to fear than we have.

## MAGISTRATE

Stop your croaking, you old crow! (*To LYSISTRATA*) Now you, say what you have to say.

## LYSISTRATA

Willingly. All the long time the war has lasted, we have endured in modest silence all you men did; you never allowed us to open our lips. We were far from satisfied, for we knew how things were going; often in our homes we would hear you discussing, upside down and inside out, some important turn of affairs. Then with sad hearts, but smiling lips, we would ask you: Well, in today's Assembly did they vote peace?—But, "Mind your own business!" the husband would growl, "Hold your tongue, please!" And we would say no more.

## CLEONICÉ

I would not have held *my* tongue though, not I!

## MAGISTRATE

You would have been reduced to silence by blows then.

## LYSISTRATA

Well, for my part, I would say no more. But presently I would come to know you had arrived at some fresh decision more fatally foolish than ever. "Ah! my dear man," I would say, "what madness next!" But he would only look at me askance and say: "Just weave your web, please; else your cheeks will smart for hours. War is men's business!"

## MAGISTRATE

Bravo! well said indeed!

## LYSISTRATA

How now, wretched man? not to let us contend against your follies was bad enough! But presently we heard you asking out loud in the open street: "Is there never a man left in Athens?" and, "No, not one, not one," you were assured in reply. Then, then we made up our minds without more delay to make common cause to save Greece. Open your ears to our wise counsels and hold your tongues, and we may yet put things on a better footing.

## MAGISTRATE

You put things indeed! Oh! this is too much! The *insolence* of the creatures!

## LYSISTRATA

Be still!

## MAGISTRATE

May I die a thousand deaths ere I obey one who wears a veil!

## LYSISTRATA

If that's all that troubles you, here, take my veil, wrap it round your head, and hold your tongue.

## CLEONICÉ

Then take this basket; put on a girdle, card wool, munch beans. The war shall be women's business.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Lay aside your water-pots, we will guard them, we will help our friends and companions.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

For myself, I will never weary of the dance; my knees will never grow stiff with fatigue. I will brave everything with my dear allies, on whom Nature has lavished virtue, grace, boldness, cleverness, and whose wisely directed energy is going to save the State.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Oh! my good, gallant Lysistrata, and all my friends, be ever like a bundle of nettles; never let your anger slacken; the winds of fortune blow our way.

## LYSISTRATA

May gentle Love and the sweet Cyprian Queen shower seductive charms on our breasts and our thighs. If only we may stir so amorous a feeling among the men that they stand as firm as sticks, we shall indeed deserve the name of peace-makers among the Greeks.

## MAGISTRATE

How will that be, pray?

## LYSISTRATA

To begin with, we shall not see you any more running like mad fellows to the Market holding lance in fist.

CLEONICÉ

That will be something gained, anyway, by the Paphian goddess, it will!

LYSISTRATA

Now we see them, mixed up with saucepans and kitchen stuff, armed to the teeth, looking like wild Corybantes!

MAGISTRATE

Why, of course; that's what brave men should do.

LYSISTRATA

Oh! but what a funny sight, to behold a man wearing a Gorgon's-head buckler coming along to buy fish!

CLEONICÉ

The other day in the Market I saw a phylarch with flowing ringlets; he was on horseback, and was pouring into his helmet the broth he had just bought at an old dame's still. There was a Thracian warrior too, who was brandishing his lance like Tereus in the play; he had scared a good woman selling figs into a perfect panic, and was gobbling up all her ripest fruit

MAGISTRATE

And how, pray, would you propose to restore peace and order in all the countries of Greece?

LYSISTRATA

It's the easiest thing in the world!

MAGISTRATE

Come, tell us how; I am curious to know.

LYSISTRATA

When we are winding thread, and it is tangled, we pass the spool across and through the skein, now this way, now that way; even so, to finish off the war, we shall send embassies hither and thither and everywhere, to disentangle matters.

MAGISTRATE

And is it with your yarn, and your skeins, and your spools, you think to appease so many bitter enmities, you silly women?

LYSISTRATA

If only you had common sense, you would always do in politics the same as we do with our yarn.



## MAGISTRATE

Come, how is that, eh?

## LYSISTRATA

First we wash the yarn to separate the grease and filth; do the same with all bad citizens, sort them out and drive them forth with rods—they're the refuse of the city. Then for all such as come crowding up in search of employments and offices, we must card them thoroughly; then, to bring them all to the same standard, pitch them pell-mell into the same basket, resident aliens or no, allies, debtors to the State, all mixed up together. Then as for our Colonies, you must think of them as so many isolated hanks; find the ends of the separate threads, draw them to a centre here, wind them into one, make one great hank of the lot, out of which the public can weave itself a good, stout tunic.

## MAGISTRATE

Is it not a sin and a shame to see them carding and winding the State, these women who have neither art nor part in the burdens of the war?

## LYSISTRATA

What! wretched man! why, it's a far heavier burden to us than to you. In the first place, we bear sons who go off to fight far away from Athens.

## MAGISTRATE

Enough said! do not recall sad and sorry memories!

## LYSISTRATA

Then secondly, instead of enjoying the pleasures of love and making the best of our youth and beauty, we are left to languish far from our husbands, who are all with the army. But say no more of ourselves; what afflicts me is to see our girls growing old in lonely grief.

## MAGISTRATE

Don't the men grow old too?

## LYSISTRATA

That is not the same thing. When the soldier returns from the wars, even though he has white hair, he very soon finds a young wife. But a woman has only one summer; if she does not make hay while the sun shines, no one will afterwards have anything to say to her, and she spends her days consulting oracles that never send her a husband.

## MAGISTRATE

But the old man who can still get an erection . . .

## LYSISTRATA

But you, why don't you get done with it and die? You are rich; go buy yourself a bier, and I will knead you a honey-cake for Cerberus. Here, take this garland.

*(Drenching him with water.)*

## CLEONICÉ

And this one too.

*(Drenching him with water.)*

## MYRRHINÉ

And these fillets.

*(Drenching him with water.)*

## LYSISTRATA

What else do you need? Step aboard the boat; Charon is waiting for you, you're keeping him from pushing off.

## MAGISTRATE

To treat me so scurvily! What an insult! I will go show myself to my fellow-magistrates just as I am.

## LYSISTRATA

What! are you blaming us for not having exposed you according to custom? Nay, console yourself; we will not fail to offer up the third-day sacrifice for you, first thing in the morning.<sup>4</sup>

*(She goes into the Acropolis, with CLEONICÉ and MYRRHINÉ.)*

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Awake, friends of freedom; let us hold ourselves aye ready to act.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN *(singing)*

I suspect a mighty peril; I foresee another tyranny like Hippias'. I am sore afraid the Laconians assembled here with Cleisthenes have, by a stratagem of war, stirred up these women, enemies of the gods, to seize upon our treasury and the funds whereby I lived.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Is it not a sin and a shame for them to interfere in advising the citizens, to prate of shields and lances, and to ally themselves with Laconians, fellows I trust no more than I would so many famished wolves? The whole thing, my friends, is nothing else but an attempt to re-establish tyranny. But I will never submit; I will be on my guard for the future; I will always carry a blade hidden under myrtle boughs; I will post myself in the public square under arms, shoulder to shoulder with Aristogiton; and

now, to make a start, I must just break a few of that cursed old jade's teeth yonder.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Nay, never play the brave man, else when you go back home, your own mother won't know you. But, dear friends and allies, first let us lay our burdens down.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

Then, citizens all, hear what I have to say. I have useful counsel to give our city, which deserves it well at my hands for the brilliant distinctions it has lavished on my girlhood. At seven years of age, I carried the sacred vessels; at ten, I pounded barley for the altar of Athené; next, clad in a robe of yellow silk, I played the bear to Artemis at the Brauronia; presently, when I was grown up, a tall, handsome maiden, they put a necklace of dried figs about my neck, and I was one of the Canephoroi.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

So surely I am bound to give my best advice to Athens. What matters that I was born a woman, if I can cure your misfortunes? I pay my share of tolls and taxes, by giving men to the State. But you, you miserable greybeards, you contribute nothing to the public charges; on the contrary, you have wasted the treasure of our forefathers, as it was called, the treasure amassed in the days of the Persian Wars. You pay nothing at all in return; and into the bargain you endanger our lives and liberties by your mistakes. Have you one word to say for yourselves? . . . Ah! don't irritate me, you there, or I'll lay my slipper across your jaws; and it's pretty heavy.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

Outrage upon outrage! things are going from bad to worse. Let us punish the minxes, every one of us that has balls to boast of. Come, off with our tunics, for a man must savour of manhood; come, my friends, let us strip naked from head to foot. Courage, I say, we who in our day garrisoned Lipsydrion; let us be young again, and shake off eld.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

If we give them the least hold over us, that's the end! their audacity will know no bounds! We shall see them building ships, and fighting sea-fights, like Artemisia; and, if they want to mount and ride as cavalry, we had best cashier the knights, for indeed women excel in riding, and have a fine, firm seat for the gallop. Just think of all those squadrons of Amazons

Micon has painted for us engaged in hand-to-hand combat with men. Come then, we must now fit collars to all these willing necks.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

By the blessed goddesses, if you anger me, I will let loose the beast of my evil passions, and a very hailstorm of blows will set you yelling for help. Come, dames, off with your tunics, and quick's the word; women must smell the smell of women in the throes of passion. . . . Now just you dare to measure strength with me, old grey-beard, and I warrant you you'll never eat garlic or black beans any more. No, not a word! my anger is at boiling point, and I'll do with you what the beetle did with the eagle's eggs.<sup>5</sup>

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I laugh at your threats, so long as I have on my side Lampito here, and the noble Theban, my dear Ismenia. . . . Pass decree on decree, you can do us no hurt, you wretch abhorred of all your fellows. Why, only yesterday, on occasion of the feast of Hecaté, I asked my neighbours of Boeotia for one of their daughters for whom my girls have a lively liking—a fine, fat eel to wit; and if they did not refuse, all along of your silly decrees! We shall never cease to suffer the like, till some one gives you a neat trip-up and breaks your neck for you! (*To LYSISTRATA as she comes out from the Acropolis*) You, Lysistrata, you who are leader of our glorious enterprise, why do I see you coming towards me with so gloomy an air?

LYSISTRATA

It's the behaviour of these naughty women, it's the female heart and female weakness that so discourage me.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Tell us, tell us, what is it?

LYSISTRATA

I only tell the simple truth.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

What has happened so disconcerting? Come, tell your friends.

LYSISTRATA

Oh! the thing is so hard to tell—yet so impossible to conceal.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Never seek to hide any ill that has befallen our cause.

LYSISTRATA

To blurt it out in a word—we want laying!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Oh! Zeus, oh! Zeus!

## LYSISTRATA

What use calling upon Zeus? The thing is even as I say. I cannot stop them any longer from lusting after the men. They are all for deserting. The first I caught was slipping out by the postern gate near the cave of Pan; another was letting herself down by a rope and pulley; a third was busy preparing her escape; while a fourth, perched on a bird's back, was just taking wing for Orsilochus' house, when I seized her by the hair. One and all, they are inventing excuses to be off home. (*Pointing to the gate*) Look! there goes one, trying to get out! Halloa there! whither away so fast?

## FIRST WOMAN

I want to go home; I have some Milesian wool in the house, which is getting all eaten up by the worms.

## LYSISTRATA

Bah! you and your worms! go back, I say!

## FIRST WOMAN

I will return immediately, I swear I will by the two goddesses! I only have just to spread it out on the bed.

## LYSISTRATA

You shall not do anything of the kind! I say, you shall not go.

## FIRST WOMAN

Must I leave my wool to spoil then?

## LYSISTRATA

Yes, if need be.

## SECOND WOMAN

Unhappy woman that I am! Alas for my flax! I've left it at home unstript!

## LYSISTRATA

So, here's another trying to escape to go home and strip her flax!

## SECOND WOMAN

Oh! I swear by the goddess of light, the instant I have put it in condition I will come straight back.

## LYSISTRATA

You shall do nothing of the kind! If once you began, others would want to follow suit.

## THIRD WOMAN

Oh! goddess divine, Ilithyia, patroness of women in labour, stay, stay the birth, till I have reached a spot less hallowed than Athené's mount! "

## LYSISTRATA

What mean you by these silly tales?

## THIRD WOMAN

I am going to have a child—now, this *minute*!

## LYSISTRATA

But you were not pregnant yesterday!

## THIRD WOMAN

Well, I am to-day. Oh! let me go in search of the midwife, Lysistrata, quick, quick!

## LYSISTRATA

What is this fable you are telling me? (*Feeling her stomach*) Ah! what have you got there so hard?

## THIRD WOMAN

A male child.

## LYSISTRATA

No, no, by Aphrodité! nothing of the sort! Why, it feels like something hollow—a pot or a kettle. (*Opening her robe*) Oh! you silly creature, if you have not got the sacred helmet of Pallas—and you said you were with child!

## THIRD WOMAN

And so I am, by Zeus, I am!

## LYSISTRATA

Then why this helmet, pray?

## THIRD WOMAN

For fear my pains should seize me in the Acropolis; I mean to lay my eggs in this helmet, as the doves do.

## LYSISTRATA

Excuses and pretences every word! the thing's as clear as daylight. Anyway, you must stay here now till the fifth day, your day of purification.

## THIRD WOMAN

I cannot sleep any more in the Acropolis, now I have seen the snake that guards the temple.

## FOURTH WOMAN

Ah! and those awful owls with their dismal hooting! I cannot get a wink of rest, and I'm just dying of fatigue.

## LYSISTRATA

You wicked women, have done with your falsehoods! You want your husbands, that's plain enough. But don't you think they want you just as badly? They are spending dreadful nights, oh! I know that well enough. But hold out, my dears, hold out! A little more patience, and the victory will be ours. An oracle promises us success, if only we remain united. Shall I repeat the words?

## THIRD WOMAN

Yes, tell us what the oracle declares.

## LYSISTRATA

Silence then! Now—"Whenas the swallows, fleeing before the hoopoes, shall have all flocked together in one place, and shall refrain them from all amorous commerce, then will be the end of all the ills of life; yea, and Zeus, who doth thunder in the skies, shall set above what was erst below . . ."

## THIRD WOMAN

What! shall the men be underneath?

## LYSISTRATA

"But if dissension do arise among the swallows, and they take wing from the holy temple, it will be said there is never a more wanton bird in all the world."

## THIRD WOMAN

Ye gods! the prophecy is clear.

## LYSISTRATA

Nay, never let us be cast down by calamity! let us be brave to bear, and go back to our posts. It would be shameful indeed not to trust the promises of the oracle.

*(They all go back into the Acropolis.)*

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

I want to tell you a fable they used to relate to me when I was a little boy. This is it: Once upon a time there was a young man called

Melanion, who hated the thought of marriage so sorely that he fled away to the wilds. So he dwelt in the mountains, wove himself nets, and caught hares. He never, never came back, he had such a horror of women. As chaste as Melanion, we loathe the jades just as much as he did.

AN OLD MAN (*beginning a brief duet with one of the women*)  
You dear old woman, I would fain kiss you.

WOMAN  
I will set you crying without onions.

OLD MAN  
And give you a sound kicking.

WOMAN (*pointing*)  
Ah, ha! what a dense forest you have there!

OLD MAN  
So was Myronides one of the bushiest of men of this side; his backside was all black, and he terrified his enemies as much as Phormio.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)  
I want to tell you a fable too, to match yours about Melanion. Once there was a certain man called Timon, a tough customer, and a whimsical, a true son of the Furies, with a face that seemed to glare out of a thorn-bush. He withdrew from the world because he couldn't abide bad men, after vomiting a thousand curses at them. He had a holy horror of ill-conditioned fellows, but he was mighty tender towards women.

WOMAN (*beginning another duet*)  
Suppose I up and broke your jaw for you!

OLD MAN  
I am not a bit afraid of you.

WOMAN  
Suppose I let fly a good kick at you?

OLD MAN  
I should see your thing then.

WOMAN  
You would see that, for all my age, it is very well plucked.



LYSISTRATA (*rushing out of the Acropolis*)

Ho there! come quick, come quick!

ONE OF THE WOMEN

What is it? Why these cries?

LYSISTRATA

A man! a man! I see him approaching all afire with the flames of love. Oh! divine Queen of Cyprus, Paphos and Cythera, I pray you still be propitious to our enterprise.

WOMAN

Where is he, this unknown foe?

LYSISTRATA

Over there—beside the Temple of Demeter.

WOMAN

Yes, indeed, I see him; but who is he?

LYSISTRATA

Look, look! do any of you recognize him?

MYRRHINÉ (*joyfully*)

I do, I do! it's my husband Cinesias.

LYSISTRATA

To work then! Be it your task to inflame and torture and torment him. Seductions, caresses, provocations, refusals, try every means! Grant every favour,—always excepting what is forbidden by our oath on the wine-bowl.

MYRRHINÉ

Have no fear, I'll do it.

LYSISTRATA

Well, I shall stay here to help you cajole the man and set his passions aflame. The rest of you withdraw.

(CINESIAS *enters, in obvious and extreme sexual excitement. A slave follows him carrying an infant.*)

CINESIAS

Alas! alas! how I am tortured by spasm and rigid convulsion! Oh! I am racked on the wheel!

LYSISTRATA

Who is this that dares to pass our lines?

CINESIAS

It is I.

LYSISTRATA

What, a man?

CINESIAS

Very much so!

LYSISTRATA

Get out.

CINESIAS

But who are you that thus repulses me?

LYSISTRATA

The sentinel of the day.

CINESIAS

For the gods' sake, call Myrrhiné.

LYSISTRATA

Call Myrrhiné, you say? And who are you?

CINESIAS

I am her husband, Cinesias, son of Pacon.

LYSISTRATA

Ah! good day, my dear friend. Your name is not unknown amongst us. Your wife has it forever on her lips; and she never touches an egg or an apple without saying: "This is for Cinesias."

CINESIAS

Really and truly?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, indeed, by Aphrodité! And if we fall to talking of men, quick your wife declares: "Oh! all the rest, they're good for nothing compared with Cinesias."

CINESIAS

Oh! please, please go and call her to me!

LYSISTRATA

And what will you give me for my trouble?

CINESIAS

Anything I've got, if you like. (*Pointing to the evidence of his condition*) I will give you what I have here!

LYSISTRATA

Well, well, I will tell her to come.

(*She enters the Acropolis.*)

CINESIAS

Quick, oh! be quick! Life has no more charms for me since she left my house. I am sad, sad, when I go indoors; it all seems so empty; my victuals have lost their savour. And all because of this erection that I can't get rid of!

MYRRHINÉ (*to LYSISTRATA, over her shoulder*)

I love him, oh! I love him; but he won't let himself be loved. No! I shall not come.

CINESIAS

Myrrhiné, my little darling Myrrhiné, what are you saying? Come down to me quick.

MYRRHINÉ

No indeed, not I.

CINESIAS

I call you, Myrrhiné, Myrrhiné; won't you *please* come?

MYRRHINÉ

Why should you call me? You do not want me.

CINESIAS

Not want you! Why, here I stand, stiff with desire!

MYRRHINÉ

Good-bye.

(*She turns, as if to go*)

CINESIAS

Oh! Myrrhiné, Myrrhiné, in our child's name, hear me; at any rate hear the child! Little lad, call your mother.

CHILD

Mamma, mamma, mamma!

CINESIAS

There, listen! Don't you pity the poor child? It's six days now you've never washed and never fed the child.

MYRRHINÉ

Poor darling, your father takes mighty little care of you!

CINESIAS

Come down, dearest, come down for the child's sake.

MYRRHINÉ

Ah! what a thing it is to be a mother! Well, well, we must come down, I suppose.

CINESIAS (*as MYRRHINÉ approaches*)

Why, how much younger and prettier she looks! And how she looks at me so lovingly! Her cruelty and scorn only redouble my passion.

MYRRHINÉ (*ignoring him; to the child*)

You are as sweet as your father is provoking! Let me kiss you, my treasure, mother's darling!

CINESIAS

Ah! what a bad thing it is to let yourself be led away by other women! Why give me such pain and suffering, and yourself into the bargain?

MYRRHINÉ (*as he is about to embrace her*)

Hands off, sir!

CINESIAS

Everything is going to rack and ruin in the house.

MYRRHINÉ

I don't care.

CINESIAS

But your web that's all being pecked to pieces by the cocks and hens, don't you care for that?

MYRRHINÉ

Precious little.

CINESIAS

And Aphrodité, whose mysteries you have not celebrated for so long? Oh! won't you please come back home?

MYRRHINÉ

No, at least, not till a sound treaty puts an end to the war.

CINESIAS

Well, if you wish it so much, why, we'll make it, your treaty.

MYRRHINÉ

Well and good! When that's done, I will come home. Till then, I am bound by an oath.

CINESIAS

At any rate, lie with me for a little while.

MYRRHINÉ

No, no, no! (*she hesitates*) but just the same I can't say I don't love you.

CINESIAS

You love me? Then why refuse to lie with me, my little girl, my sweet Myrrhiné?

MYRRHINÉ (*pretending to be shocked*)

You must be joking! What, before the child!

CINESIAS (*to the slave*)

Manes, carry the lad home. There, you see, the child is gone; there's nothing to hinder us; won't you lie down now?

MYRRHINÉ

But, miserable man, where, where?

CINESIAS

In the cave of Pan; nothing could be better.

MYRRHINÉ

But how shall I purify myself before going back into the citadel?

CINESIAS

Nothing easier! you can wash at the Clepsydra.

MYRRHINÉ

But my oath? Do you want me to perjure myself?

CINESIAS

I'll take all responsibility; don't worry.

MYRRHINÉ

Well, I'll be off, then, and find a bed for us.

CINESIAS

There's no point in that; surely we can lie on the ground.

MYRRHINÉ

No, no! even though you are bad, I don't like your lying on the bare earth.

*(She goes back into the Acropolis.)*

CINESIAS *(enraptured)*

Ah! how the dear girl loves me!

MYRRHINÉ *(coming back with a cot)*

Come, get to bed quick; I am going to undress. But, oh dear, we must get a mattress.

CINESIAS

A mattress? Oh! no, never mind about that!

MYRRHINÉ

No, by Artemis! lie on the bare sacking? never! That would be squalid.

CINESIAS

Kiss me!

MYRRHINÉ

Wait a minute!

*(She leaves him again.)*

CINESIAS

Good god, hurry up!

MYRRHINÉ *(coming back with a mattress)*

Here is a mattress. Lie down, I am just going to undress. But you've got no pillow.

CINESIAS

I don't want one either!

MYRRHINÉ

But *I* do.

*(She leaves him again.)*

CINESIAS

Oh god, oh god, she treats my tool just like Heracles!

MYRRHINÉ *(coming back with a pillow)*

There, lift your head, dear! *(Wondering what else to tantalize him with; to herself)* Is that all, I wonder?

CINESIAS *(misunderstanding)*

Surely, there's nothing else. Come, my treasure.

MYRRHINÉ

I am just unfastening my girdle. But remember what you promised me about making peace; mind you keep your word.

CINESIAS

Yes, yes, upon my life I will.

MYRRHINÉ

Why, you have no blanket!

CINESIAS

My god, what difference does *that* make? What I want is to make love!

MYRRHINÉ (*going out again*)

Never fear—directly, directly! I'll be back in no time.

CINESIAS

The woman will kill me with her blankets!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a blanket*)

Now, get yourself up.

CINESIAS (*pointing*)

I've got *this* up!

MYRRHINÉ

Wouldn't you like me to scent you?

CINESIAS

No, by Apollo, no, please don't!

MYRRHINÉ

Yes, by Aphrodité, but I will, whether you like it or not.

(*She goes out again.*)

CINESIAS

God, I wish she'd hurry up and get through with all this!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a flask of perfume*)

Hold out your hand; now rub it in.

CINESIAS

Oh! in Apollo's name, I don't much like the smell of it; but perhaps it will improve when it's well rubbed in. It does not somehow smack of the marriage bed!

## MYRRHINÉ

Oh dear! what a scatterbrain I am; if I haven't gone and brought Rhodian perfumes!

## CINESIAS

Never mind, dearest, let it go now.

## MYRRHINÉ

You don't really *mean* that.

(*She goes.*)

## CINESIAS

Damn the man who invented perfumes!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with another flask*)

Here, take this bottle.

## CINESIAS

I have a better one all ready for you, darling. Come, you provoking creature, to bed with you, and don't bring another thing.

## MYRRHINÉ

Coming, coming; I'm just slipping off my shoes. Dear boy, will you vote for peace?

## CINESIAS

I'll think about it. (MYRRHINÉ *runs away.*) I'm a dead man, she is killing me! She has gone, and left me in torment! (*in tragic style*) I must have someone to lay, I must! Ah me! the loveliest of women has choused and cheated me. Poor little lad, how am I to give you what you want so badly? Where is Cynalopex? quick, man, get him a nurse, do!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Poor, miserable wretch, baulked in your amorousness! what tortures are yours! Ah! you fill me with pity. Could any man's back and loins stand such a strain. He stands stiff and rigid, and there's never a wench to help him!

## CINESIAS

Ye gods in heaven, what pains I suffer!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Well, there it is; it's her doing, that abandoned hussy!

## CINESIAS

No, no! rather say that sweetest, dearest darling.

(*He departs.*)



## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

That dearest darling? no, no, that hussy, say I! Zeus, thou god of the skies, canst not let loose a hurricane, to sweep them all up into the air, and whirl them round, then drop them down crash! and impale them on the point of this man's tool!

(*A Spartan HERALD enters; he shows signs of being in the same condition as CINESIAS.*)

## HERALD

Say, where shall I find the Senate and the Prytanes? I am bearer of despatches.

(*An Athenian MAGISTRATE enters.*)

## MAGISTRATE

Are you a man or a Priapus?

HERALD (*with an effort at officiousness*)

Don't be stupid! I am a herald, of course, I swear I am, and I come from Sparta about making peace.

MAGISTRATE (*pointing*)

But look, you are hiding a lance under your clothes, surely.

HERALD (*embarrassed*)

No, nothing of the sort.

## MAGISTRATE

Then why do you turn away like that, and hold your cloak out from your body? Have you got swellings in the groin from your journey?

## HERALD

By the twin brethren! the man's an old maniac.

## MAGISTRATE

But you've got an erection! You lewd fellow!

## HERALD

I tell you no! but enough of this foolery.

MAGISTRATE (*pointing*)

Well, what is it you have *there* then?

## HERALD

A Lacedaemonian 'skytalé.'

## MAGISTRATE

Oh, indeed, a 'skytalé,' is it? Well, well, speak out frankly; I know all about these matters. How are things going at Sparta now?

## HERALD

Why, everything is turned upside down at Sparta; and all the allies have erections. We simply must have Pellené.

## MAGISTRATE

What is the reason of it all? Is it the god Pan's doing?

## HERALD

No, it's all the work of Lampito and the women who are acting at her instigation; they have kicked the men out from between their thighs.

## MAGISTRATE

But what are you doing about it?

## HERALD

We are at our wits' end; we walk bent double, just as if we were carrying lanterns in a wind. The jades have sworn we shall not so much as touch them till we have all agreed to conclude peace.

## MAGISTRATE

Ah! I see now, it's a *general* conspiracy embracing all Greece. Go back to Sparta and bid them send envoys plenipotentiary to treat for peace. I will urge our Senators myself to name plenipotentiaries from us; and to persuade them, why, I will show them my own tool.

## HERALD

What could be better? I fly at your command.

*(They go out in opposite directions.)*

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

No wild beast is there, no flame of fire, more fierce and untamable than woman; the leopard is less savage and shameless.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

And yet you dare to make war upon me, wretch, when you might have me for your most faithful friend and ally.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Never, never can my hatred cease towards women.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Well, suit yourself. Still I cannot bear to leave you all naked as you are; folks would laugh at you. Come, I am going to put this tunic on you

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

You are right, upon my word! it was only in my confounded fit of rage that I took it off.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Now at any rate you look like a man, and they won't make fun of you. Ah! if you had not offended me so badly, I would take out that nasty insect you have in your eye for you.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah! so that's what was annoying me so! Look, here's a ring, just remove the insect, and show it to me. By Zeus! it has been hurting my eye for a long time now.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Well, I agree, though your manners are not over and above pleasant. Oh! what a huge great gnat! just look! It's from Tricorythus, for sure.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

A thousand thanks! the creature was digging a regular well in my eye; now that it's gone, my tears can flow freely.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I will wipe them for you—bad, naughty man though you are. Now, just one kiss.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

A kiss? certainly not!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Just one, whether you like it or not.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh! those confounded women! how they do cajole us! How true the saying: " 'Tis impossible to live with the baggages, impossible to live without 'em!" Come, let us agree for the future not to regard each other any more as enemies; and to clinch the bargain, let us sing a choric song.

COMBINED CHORUS OF WOMEN AND OLD MEN (*singing*)

We desire, Athenians, to speak ill of no man; but on the contrary to say much good of everyone, and to do the like. We have had enough of misfortunes and calamities. If there is any man or woman who wants a bit of money—two or three minas or so; well, our purse is full. If only peace is concluded, the borrower will not have to pay back. Also I'm inviting to supper a few Carystian friends, who are excellently well qualified. I have still a drop of good soup left, and a

young porker I'm going to kill, and the flesh will be sweet and tender. I shall expect you at my house to-day; but first away to the baths with you, you and your children; then come all of you, ask no one's leave, but walk straight up, as if you were at home; never fear, the door will be . . . shut in your faces!

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah! here come the envoys from Sparta with their long flowing beards; why, you would think they wore pigstyes between their thighs. (*Enter the LACONIAN ENVOYS afflicted like their herald.*) Hail to you, first of all, Laconians; then tell us how you fare.

## LACONIAN ENVOY

No need for many words; you can see what a state we are in.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Alas! the situation grows more and more strained! the intensity of the thing is simply frightful.

## LACONIAN ENVOY

It's beyond belief. But to work! summon your Commissioners, and let us patch up the best peace we may.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah! our men too, like wrestlers in the arena, cannot endure a rag over their bellies; it's an athlete's malady, which only exercise can remedy. (*The MAGISTRATE returns; he too now has an evident reason to desire peace.*)

## MAGISTRATE

Can anybody tell us where Lysistrata is? Surely she will have some compassion on our condition.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*pointing*)

Look! now he has the very same complaint. (*To the MAGISTRATE*) Don't you feel a strong nervous tension in the morning?

## MAGISTRATE

Yes, and a dreadful, dreadful torture it is! Unless peace is made very soon, we shall find no recourse but to make love to Clisthenes.

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Take my advice, and arrange your clothes as best you can; one of the fellows who mutilated the Hermae might see you.

## MAGISTRATE

Right, by Zeus.

*(He endeavours, not too successfully, to conceal his condition.)*

## LACONIAN ENVOY

Quite right, by the Dioscuri. There, I will put on my tunic.

## MAGISTRATE

Oh! what a terrible state we are in! Greeting to you, Laconian fellow-sufferers.

LACONIAN ENVOY *(addressing one of his countrymen)*

Ah! my boy, what a terrible thing it would have been if these fellows had seen us just now when we were on full stand!

## MAGISTRATE

Speak out, Laconians, what is it brings you here?

## LACONIAN ENVOY

We have come to treat for peace.

## MAGISTRATE

Well said; we are of the same mind. Better call Lysistrata, then; she is the only person who will bring us to terms.

## LACONIAN ENVOY

Yes, yes—and Lysistratus into the bargain, if you will.

## MAGISTRATE

Needless to call her; she has heard your voices, and here she comes.  
*(She comes out of the Acropolis.)*

## LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Hail, boldest and bravest of womankind! The time is come to show yourself in turn uncompromising and conciliatory, exacting and yielding, haughty and condescending. Call up all your skill and artfulness. Lo! the foremost men in Hellas, seduced by your fascinations, are agreed to entrust you with the task of ending their quarrels.

## LYSISTRATA

It will be an easy task—if only they refrain from mutual indulgence in masculine love; if they do, I shall know the fact at once. Now, where is the gentle goddess Peace? *(The goddess, in the form of a beautiful nude girl is brought in by the Machine.)* Lead hither the Laconian envoys. But, look you, no roughness or violence; our husbands always behaved so boorishly. Bring them to me with smiles, as women should. If any refuse

to give you his hand, then take hold of his tool. Bring up the Athenians too; you may lead them either way. Laconians, approach; and you, Athenians, on my other side. Now hearken all! I am but a woman; but I have good common sense; Nature has endowed me with discriminating judgment, which I have yet further developed, thanks to the wise teachings of my father and the elders of the city. First I must bring a reproach against you that applies equally to both sides. At Olympia, and Thermopylae, and Delphi, and a score of other places too numerous to mention, you celebrate before the same altars ceremonies common to all Hellenes; yet you go cutting each other's throats, and sacking Hellenic cities, when all the while the barbarian yonder is threatening you! That is my first point.

MAGISTRATE (*devouring the goddess with his eyes*)  
Good god, this erection is killing me!

LYSISTRATA

Now it is to you I address myself, Laconians. Have you forgotten how Periclidas, your own countryman, sat a suppliant before our altars? How pale he was in his purple robes! He had come to crave an army of us; it was the time when Messenia was pressing you sore, and the Sea-god was shaking the earth. Cimon marched to your aid at the head of four thousand hoplites, and saved Lacedaemon. And, after such a service as that, you ravage the soil of your benefactors!

MAGISTRATE

They do wrong, very wrong, Lysistrata.

LACONIAN ENVOY

We do wrong, very wrong. (*Looking at the goddess*) Ah! great gods! what a lovely bottom Peace has!

LYSISTRATA

And now a word to the Athenians. Have you no memory left of how, in the days when you wore the tunic of slaves, the Laconians came, spear in hand, and slew a host of Thessalians and partisans of Hippias the tyrant? They, and they only, fought on your side on that eventful day; they delivered you from despotism, and thanks to them our nation could change the short tunic of the slave for the long cloak of the free man.

LACONIAN ENVOY (*looking at LYSISTRATA*)

I have never seen a woman of more gracious dignity.

MAGISTRATE (*looking at PEACE*)

I have never seen a woman with a finer body!

## LYSISTRATA

Bound by such ties of mutual kindness, how can you bear to be at war?  
Stop, stay the hateful strife, be reconciled; what hinders you?

## LACONIAN ENVOY

We are quite ready, if they will give us back our rampart.

## LYSISTRATA

What rampart, my dear man?

## LACONIAN ENVOY

Pylos, which we have been asking for and craving for ever so long.

## MAGISTRATE

In the Sea-god's name, you shall never have it!

## LYSISTRATA

Agree, my friends, agree.

## MAGISTRATE

But then what city shall we be able to stir up trouble in?

## LYSISTRATA

Ask for another place in exchange.

## MAGISTRATE

Ah! that's the ticket! Well, to begin with, give us Echinus, the Maliac gulf adjoining, and the two legs of Megara.

## LACONIAN ENVOY

No, by the Dioscuri, surely not all that, my dear sir.

## LYSISTRATA

Come to terms; never make a difficulty of two legs more or less!

MAGISTRATE (*his eye on PEACE*)

Well, I'm ready to strip down and get to work right now.

(*He takes off his mantle.*)

LACONIAN ENVOY (*following out this idea*)

And I also, to dung it to start with.

## LYSISTRATA

That's just what you shall do, once peace is signed. So, if you really want to make it, go consult your allies about the matter.

## MAGISTRATE

What allies, I should like to know? Why, we are *all* erected; there's no one who is not mad to be mating. What we all want is to be in bed with our wives; how should our allies fail to second our project?

## LACONIAN ENVOY

And ours too, for certain sure!

## MAGISTRATE

The Carystians first and foremost, by the gods!

## LYSISTRATA

Well said, indeed! Now go and purify yourselves for entering the Acropolis, where the women invite you to supper; we will empty our provision baskets to do you honour. At table, you will exchange oaths and pledges; then each man will go home with his wife.

## MAGISTRATE

Come along then, and as quick as may be.

## LACONIAN ENVOY

Lead on; I'm your man.

## MAGISTRATE

Quick, quick's the word, say I.

*(They follow LYSISTRATA into the Acropolis.)*

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

Embroidered stuffs, and dainty tunics, and flowing gowns, and golden ornaments, everything I have, I offer them to you with all my heart; take them all for your children, for your girls, in case they are chosen Canephorai. I invite you every one to enter, come in and choose whatever you will; there is nothing so well fastened, you cannot break the seals, and carry away the contents. Look about you everywhere . . . you won't find a blessed thing, unless you have sharper eyes than mine. And if any of you lacks corn to feed his slaves and his young and numerous family, why, I have a few grains of wheat at home; let him take what I have to give, a big twelve-pound loaf included. So let my poorer neighbours all come with bags and wallets; my man, Manes, shall give them corn; but I warn them not to come near my door, but—beware the dog!

*(Another MAGISTRATE enters, and begins knocking at the gate.)*

## SECOND MAGISTRATE

I say, you, open the door! *(To the WOMEN)* Go your way, I tell you. *(As the women sit down in front of the gate)* Why, bless me, they're



sitting down now; I shall have to singe 'em with my torch to make 'em stir! What impudence! I won't take this. Oh, well, if it's absolutely necessary, just to please you, we'll have to take the trouble.

AN ATHENIAN

And I'll share it with you.

(*He brandishes the torch he is carrying and the CHORUS OF WOMEN departs. The CHORUS OF OLD MEN follows shortly after.*)

SECOND MAGISTRATE

No, no, you must be off—or I'll tear your hair out, I will; be off, I say, and don't annoy the Laconian envoys; they're just coming out from the banquet-hall.

ATHENIAN

Such a merry banquet I've never seen before! The Laconians were simply charming. After the drink is in, why, we're all wise men, every one of us.

MAGISTRATE

It's only natural, to be sure, for sober, we're all fools. Take my advice, my fellow-countrymen, our envoys should always be drunk. We go to Sparta; we enter the city sober; why, we must be picking a quarrel directly. We don't understand what they say to us, we imagine a lot they don't say at all, and we report home all wrong, all topsy-turvy. But, look you, to-day it's quite different; we're enchanted whatever happens; instead of Clitagora, they might sing us Telamon, and we should clap our hands just the same. A perjury or two into the bargain, why! What does that matter to merry companions in their cups?

(*The two CHORUSES return.*) But here they are back again! Will you begone, you loafing scoundrels.

(*The CHORUSES retire again.*)

ATHENIAN

Ah ha! here's the company coming out already.

(*Two choruses, one Laconian and one Athenian, enter, dancing to the music of flutes; they are followed by the women under the leadership of LYSISTRATA.*)

A LACONIAN

My dear, sweet friend, come, take your flute in hand; I would fain dance and sing my best in honour of the Athenians and our noble selves.

ATHENIAN

Yes, take your flute, in the gods' name. What a delight to see him dance!

LACONIAN (*dancing and singing*)

Oh! Mnemosyné! inspire these men, inspire my muse who knows our exploits and those of the Athenians. With what a god-like ardour did they swoop down at Artemisium on the ships of the Medes! What a glorious victory was that! For the soldiers of Leonidas, they were like fierce boars whetting their tusks. The sweat ran down their faces, and drenched all their limbs, for verily the Persians were as many as the sands of the seashore. Oh! Artemis, huntress queen, whose arrows pierce the denizens of the woods, virgin goddess, be thou favourable to the peace we here conclude; through thee may our hearts be long united! May this treaty draw close for ever the bonds of a happy friendship! No more wiles and stratagems! Aid us, oh! aid us, maiden huntress!

## MAGISTRATE

All is for the best; and now, Laconians, take your wives away home with you, and you, Athenians, yours. May husband live happily with wife, and wife with husband. Dance, dance, to celebrate our bliss, and let us be heedful to avoid like mistakes for the future.

CHORUS OF ATHENIANS (*singing*)

Appear, appear, dancers, and the Graces with you! Let us invoke, one and all, Artemis, and her heavenly brother, gracious Apollo, patron of the dance, and Dionysus, whose eye darts flame, as he steps forward surrounded by the Maenad maids, and Zeus, who wields the flashing lightning, and his august, thrice-blessed spouse, the Queen of Heaven! These let us invoke, and all the other gods, calling all the inhabitants of the skies to witness the noble Peace now concluded under the fond auspices of Aphrodité. Io Paeon! Io Paeon! dance, leap, as in honour of a victory won. *Euoí! Euoí! Euai! Euai!*

## MAGISTRATE

And you, our Laconian guests, sing us a new and inspiring strain!

LACONIAN (*singing*)

Leave once more, oh! leave once more the noble height of Taygetus, oh! Muse of Lacedaemon, and join us in singing the praises of Apollo of Amyclae, and Athené of the Brazen House, and the gallant twin sons of Tyndareus, who practise arms on the banks of the Eurotas river. Haste, haste hither with nimble-footed pace, let us sing Sparta, the city that delights in choruses divinely sweet and graceful dances, when our maidens bound lightly by the river side, like frolicsome fillies, beating the ground with rapid steps and shaking their long locks in the wind, as Bacchantes wave their wands in

the wild revels of the Wine-god. At their head, oh! chaste and beautiful goddess, daughter of Leto, Artemis, do thou lead the song and dance. With a fillet binding thy waving tresses, appear in thy loveliness; leap like a fawn, strike thy divine hands together to animate the dance, and aid us to renown the valiant goddess of battles, great Athené of the Brazen House!

*(All depart, singing and dancing.)*

#### NOTES FOR LYSISTRATA

1. This was a constant weakness of Athenian democracy; lacking any sort of centralization it was fatally inefficient in crises.

2. Aristophanes frequently jests on the actual or supposed bibulousness of the Athenian women.

3. The reference is to *The Seven Against Thebes*, 42 ff.

4. This sacrifice was offered to the spirit of the departed on the third day after the funeral.

5. According to the fable the eagle and the beetle were at war; the eagle devoured the beetle's young and the latter retaliated by getting into its nest and tumbling out its eggs. The eagle then complained to Zeus and was advised to lay its eggs in his bosom; the beetle then flew up to the house of Zeus and began buzzing around his ears. When he rose to chase the insect away the eagle's eggs fell to the earth and were smashed to bits.

6. The Acropolis was sacred to Athené, a virgin goddess.

VIII

THE THESMOPHORIAZUSAE

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

EURIPIDES

MNESILOCHUS, *Father-in-law of Euripides*

AGATHON

SERVANT OF AGATHON

HERALD

WOMEN

CLISTHENES

A MAGISTRATE

A SCYTHIAN POLICEMAN

CHORUS OF THESMOPHORIAZUSAE—*women*  
*celebrating the THESMOPHORIA*

## INTRODUCTION

THE otherwise unfortunate year 411 witnessed the production of two of Aristophanes' comedies, and the exhibition of *Lysistrata* at the Lenaea was supplemented by *The Thesmophoriazusae* at the Great Dionysia two months later. No notice of the prizes awarded at this festival has been preserved, but it is tempting to conjecture and not impossible to believe that the composition of *The Frogs* in 405 was suggested or motivated by a victory of *The Thesmophoriazusae* six years earlier. The detachment from contemporary realities so noteworthy in *The Birds* and clearly recognizable in *Lysistrata* despite a pacifistic theme, is equally characteristic of *The Thesmophoriazusae*, for the subject of the play is essentially literary and has nothing whatever to do with any political or social issues. The ridicule of Euripides, which is the general theme of the comedy, is foreshadowed in *The Acharnians*, but there the target of Aristophanes' gibes is the wretchedness of so many of the dramatist's heroes, and only a part of the play is devoted to it, whereas here it is the tragedian's notorious misogyny that creates the humorous situation, and the whole of the comedy is occupied with this.

When the play opens we find Euripides and his father-in-law Mnesilochus arriving in front of the house of the dramatist Agathon, to seek his assistance in a matter of great importance. The women of Athens have resolved to punish Euripides for the insults to their sex which are so numerous in his tragedies, and his case is to be discussed and decided in their Assembly at the Thesmophoria this very day. Convinced that they will condemn him to death unless there is someone present at the meeting to defend him, he has decided to ask the effeminate Agathon to undertake this office. The latter is soon displayed by the eccyclema, ensconced in his boudoir, but he politely and firmly refuses Euripides' request. Mnesilochus accordingly volunteers to lend whatever assistance he can, and Euripides immediately sets about removing all possible evidences of his relative's masculinity. His face is shaved and his loins singed, and he is then fitted out with a complete set of feminine garments generously loaned by Agathon from his well-stocked wardrobe. Mnesilochus departs for the meeting, making every effort to speak and to act in as womanly a fashion as possible.

The scene shifts to the Thesmophorion, where the debate on Euripides is opened and a speaker recommends that he be put to death. Mnesilochus makes an eloquent and misguided defense of the dramatist, in the course of which he repeatedly insults the fair sex by pointing out how many of their sins have never even been mentioned by his son-in-law. The infuriated Assembly is about to chastise him immediately and violently, when, to make matters worse, the notorious pederast Clisthenes, who has somehow got wind of Euripides' scheme, rushes in and informs the horrified women that there is a man in their midst. An investigation is forthwith made, and Mnesilochus is eventually discovered. Clisthenes departs to report the matter to the magistrates, and the Chorus, or rather its leader, delivers something resembling a parabasis, in which the virtues of men and women are compared, greatly to the advantage of the latter. Formally the passage is highly incomplete, for it contains only the anapests and one epirrheme. Remembering the parabasis in *Peace* we may perhaps conjecture that *The Thesmophoriazusae* was also somewhat hastily composed.

Even before the delivery of the parabasis, Mnesilochus has been energetically racking his brain to discover an effective means of escape, and he has been able to think of nothing better than the device of Oeax in the tragedy *Palamedes*. He accordingly has sent to his son-in-law messages written on wooden statues, in lieu of oars, and flung about in all directions. The ingenious adaptation of the dramatist's artifice is eminently unsuccessful, and as soon as the Chorus leader has completed his delivery of the epirrheme, Mnesilochus adopts another tactic and begins reciting lines from the part of Helen in the recent tragedy of that name. The same curious prank of fortune which had brought her husband to Egypt now summons Euripides to the Thesmophorion, costumed as Menelaus and reciting many of the lines of that fortunate hero. So far all is well, but the more difficult problem of effecting the escape of Mnesilochus remains unsolved, and the arrival of the magistrate to whom Clisthenes has reported the women's plight frustrates the purposes and necessitates the retirement of the wily tragedian. The customary Scythian policeman, whom the magistrate has brought with him, arrests Mnesilochus and binds him to a post, to be, in his feminine attire, a wretched and ridiculous spectacle to the world at large. But Euripides has promised never to abandon him, "so long as one of his numberless artifices remains untried," and Mnesilochus accordingly makes another effort, using the poet's *Andromeda* as the source of his inspiration. He quotes a long and lugubrious lament made by the heroine of that play, and his son-in-law promptly replies from the wings in the rôle of Echo. A ludicrous scene ensues in which Euripides repeats the final word or phrase of everything that is said by his father-in-law or by the Scythian, but this is far from



setting the poor man free, and eventually the dramatist appears as Perseus and seeks to rescue the maiden Mnesilochus; "Each man has his own particular weakness," he says, "as for me I am aflame with love for this virgin." The old man's back is turned and there is no need to untie him; the policeman therefore has no objections to anything that Euripides may wish to do, but the intimation that Mnesilochus is actually to be released elicits prompt and uncompromising opposition. Euripides is now convinced that the refinements of his dramaturgical ingenuity are lost on the torpid barbarian, and he resolves to invent some artifice better adapted to the brutish nature of his opponent. Making his peace with the Chorus by promising never to malign them in the future, he departs to change his costume and almost immediately returns, rather transparently disguised as an old bawd, and bringing with him two girls, a flute-player and a dancer. The Chorus penetrates his disguise without difficulty, but the Scythian is so captivated by the dancing girl that he suspects nothing and is readily induced to go offstage for a while. Euripides quickly releases his father-in-law and takes him home, and the Chorus is obliging enough to start the distressed policeman off in the opposite direction from that in which the pair have departed.

Such is the ending of what is perhaps the best comedy that its author produced. Nowhere else do we find so perfect a blend of animal and intellectual ingredients, embodied in a play so skillfully constructed and so artistically unified; nor is Aristophanes' wit ever so brilliant as it is in *The Thesmophoriazusae*. With it the best decade of the poet's career is brought to a close, and in the three comedies that have survived from the later years we shall never meet quite the same Aristophanes again.

## THE THESMOPHORIAZUSAE

(SCENE:—*Behind the orchestra are two buildings, one the house of the poet AGATHION, the other the Thesmophorion. EURIPIDES enters from the right, at a rapid pace, with an air of searching for something; his father-in-law MNESILOCHUS, who is extremely aged, follows him as best he can, with an obviously painful expenditure of effort* )

MNESILOCHUS

GREAT ZEUS! will the swallow never appear to end the winter of my discontent? Why the fellow has kept me on the run ever since early this morning; he wants to kill me, that's certain. Before I lose my spleen entirely, Euripides, can you at least tell me where you are leading me?

EURIPIDES

What need for you to hear what you are going to see?

MNESILOCHUS

How is that? Repeat it. No need for me to hear . . .

EURIPIDES

What you are going to see.

MNESILOCHUS

Nor consequently to see . . .

EURIPIDES

What you have to hear.

MNESILOCHUS

What is this wiseacre stuff you are telling me? I must neither see nor hear?

EURIPIDES

Ah! but you have two things there that are essentially distinct.

MNESILOCHUS

Seeing and hearing?

EURIPIDES

Undoubtedly.

MNESILOCHUS

In what way distinct?

EURIPIDES

In this way. Formerly, when Aether separated the elements and bore the animals that were moving in her bosom, she wished to endow them with sight, and so made the eye round like the sun's disc and bored ears in the form of a funnel.

MNESILOCHUS

And because of this funnel I neither see nor hear. Ah! great gods! I am delighted to know it. What a fine thing it is to talk with wise men!

EURIPIDES

I will teach you many another thing of the sort.

MNESILOCHUS

That's well to know; but first of all I should like to find out how to grow lame, so that I need not have to follow you all about.

EURIPIDES

Come, hear and give heed!

MNESILOCHUS

I'm here and waiting.

EURIPIDES

Do you see that little door?

MNESILOCHUS

Yes, certainly.

EURIPIDES

Silence!

MNESILOCHUS

Silence about what? About the door?

EURIPIDES

Pay attention!

MNESILOCHUS

Pay attention and be silent about the door? Very well.

EURIPIDES

That is where Agathon, the celebrated tragic poet, dwells.

MNESILOCHUS

Who is this Agathon?

EURIPIDES

He's a certain Agathon . . .

MNESILOCHUS

Swarthy, robust of build?

EURIPIDES

No, another.

MNESILOCHUS

I have never seen him. He has a big beard?

EURIPIDES

Have you never *seen* him?

MNESILOCHUS

Never, so far as I know.

EURIPIDES

And yet you have made love to him. Well, it must have been without knowing who he was. (*The door of AGATHON'S house opens.*) Ah! let us step aside; here is one of his slaves bringing a brazier and some myrtle branches; no doubt he is going to offer a sacrifice and pray for a happy poetical inspiration for Agathon.

SERVANT OF AGATHON (*standing on the threshold; solemnly*)

Silence! oh, people! keep your mouths sedately shut! The chorus of the Muses is moulding songs at my master's hearth. Let the winds hold their breath in the silent Aether! Let the azure waves cease murmuring on the shore! . . .

MNESILOCHUS

*Bombax.*<sup>1</sup>

EURIPIDES

Be still! I want to hear what he is saying.

## SERVANT

. . . Take your rest, ye winged races, and you, ye savage inhabitants of the woods, cease from your erratic wandering . . .

MNESILOCHUS (*more loudly*)

*Bombalobombax.*

## SERVANT

. . . for Agathon, our master, the sweet-voiced poet, is going . . .

MNESILOCHUS

. . . to be made love to?

## SERVANT

Whose voice is that?

MNESILOCHUS

It's the silent Aether.

## SERVANT

. . . is going to construct the framework of a drama. He is rounding fresh poetical forms, he is polishing them in the lathe and is welding them; he is hammering out sentences and metaphors; he is working up his subject like soft wax. First he models it and then he casts it in bronze . . .

MNESILOCHUS

. . . and sways his buttocks amorously.

## SERVANT

Who is the rustic that approaches this sacred enclosure?

MNESILOCHUS

Take care of yourself and of your sweet-voiced poet! I have a strong tool here both well rounded and well polished, which will pierce your enclosure and penetrate you.

## SERVANT

Old man, you must have been a *very* insolent fellow in your youth!

EURIPIDES (*to the SERVANT*)

Let him be, friend, and, quick, go and call Agathon to me.

## SERVANT

It's not worth the trouble, for he will soon be here himself. He has started to compose, and in winter it is never possible to round off strophes without coming to the sun to excite the imagination.

EURIPIDES

And what am I to do?

SERVANT

Wait till he gets here.

*(He goes into the house.)*

EURIPIDES

Oh, Zeus! what hast thou in store for me to-day?

MNESILOCHUS

Great gods, what is the matter now? What are you grumbling and groaning for? Tell me; you must not conceal anything from your father-in-law.

EURIPIDES

Some great misfortune is brewing against me.

MNESILOCHUS

What is it?

EURIPIDES

This day will decide whether it is all over with Euripides or not.

MNESILOCHUS

But how? Neither the tribunals nor the Senate are sitting, for it is the third day of the Thesmophoria.

EURIPIDES

That is precisely what makes me tremble; the women have plotted my ruin, and to-day they are to gather in the Temple of Demeter to execute their decision.

MNESILOCHUS

What have they against you?

EURIPIDES

Because I mishandle them in my tragedies.

MNESILOCHUS

By Posidon, you would seem to have thoroughly deserved your fate. But how are you going to get out of the mess?

EURIPIDES

I am going to beg Agathon, the tragic poet, to go to the Thesmophoria.

MNESILOCHUS

And what is he to do there?

EURIPIDES

He would mingle with the women, and stand up for me, if needful.

MNESILOCHUS

Would he be openly present or secretly?

EURIPIDES

Secretly, dressed in woman's clothes.

MNESILOCHUS

That's a clever notion, thoroughly worthy of you. The prize for trickery is ours.

*(The door of AGATHON'S house opens.)*

EURIPIDES

Silence!

MNESILOCHUS

What's the matter?

EURIPIDES

Here comes Agathon.

MNESILOCHUS

Where, where?

EURIPIDES

That's the man they are bringing out yonder on the eccyclema.

*(AGATHON appears on the eccyclema, softly reposing on a bed, clothed in a saffron tunic, and surrounded with feminine toilet articles.)*

MNESILOCHUS

I am blind then! I see no man here, I only see Cyrené.

EURIPIDES

Be still! He is getting ready to sing.

MNESILOCHUS

What subtle trill, I wonder, is he going to warble to us?

AGATHON

*(He now sings a selection from one of his tragedies, taking first the part of the leader of the chorus and then that of the whole chorus.)*

(AS LEADER OF THE CHORUS)

Damsels, with the sacred torch in hand, unite your dance to shouts of joy in honour of the nether goddesses; celebrate the freedom of your country.

(AS CHORUS)

To what divinity is your homage addressed? I wish to mingle mine with it.

(AS LEADER OF THE CHORUS)

Oh! Muse! glorify Phoebus with his golden bow, who erected the walls of the city of the Simois.

(AS CHORUS)

To thee, oh Phoebus, I dedicate my most beauteous songs, to thee, the sacred victor in the poetical contests.

(AS LEADER OF THE CHORUS)

And praise Artemis too, the maiden huntress, who wanders on the mountains and through the woods . . .

(AS CHORUS)

I, in my turn, celebrate the everlasting happiness of the chaste Artemis, the mighty daughter of Leto!

(AS LEADER OF THE CHORUS)

. . . and Leto and the tones of the Asiatic lyre, which wed so well with the dances of the Phrygian Graces.

(AS CHORUS)

I do honour to the divine Leto and to the lyre, the mother of songs of male and noble strains. The eyes of the goddess sparkle while listening to our enthusiastic chants. Honour to the powerful Phoebus! Hail! thou blessed son of Leto.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! ye venerable Genetyllides, what tender and voluptuous songs! They surpass the most lascivious kisses in sweetness; I feel a thrill of delight pass up me as I listen to them. (*To EURIPIDES*) Young man, if you are one, answer my questions, which I am borrowing from Aeschylus' "Lycurgeia." Whence comes this androgyne? What is his country? his dress? What contradictions his life shows! A lyre and a hair-net! A wrestling school oil flask and a girdle! What could be more contradictory? What relation has a mirror to a sword? (*To AGATHON*) And you yourself, who are you? Do you pretend to be a man? Where is your tool, pray? Where is the cloak, the footgear that belong to that sex? Are you a



woman? Then where are your breasts? Answer me. But you keep silent. Oh! just as you choose; your songs display your character quite sufficiently.

## AGATHON

Old man, old man, I hear the shafts of jealousy whistling by my ears, but they do not hit me. My dress is in harmony with my thoughts. A poet must adopt the nature of his characters. Thus, if he is placing women on the stage, he must contract all their habits in his own person.

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

Then you make love horse-fashion when you are composing a Phaedra.

## AGATHON

If the heroes are men, everything in him will be manly. What we don't possess by nature, we must acquire by imitation.

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

When you are staging Satyrs, call me; I will do my best to help you from behind, if I can get my tool up.

## AGATHON

Besides, it is bad taste for a poet to be coarse and hairy. Look at the famous Ibycus, at Anacreon of Teos, and at Alcaeus, who handled music so well; they wore head-bands and found pleasure in the lascivious dances of Ionia. And have you not heard what a dandy Phrynichus was and how careful in his dress? For this reason his pieces were also beautiful, for the works of a poet are copied from himself.

## MNESILOCHUS

Ah! so it is for this reason that Philocles, who is so hideous, writes hideous pieces; Xenocles, who is malicious, malicious ones, and Theognis, who is cold, such cold ones?

## AGATHON

Yes, necessarily and unavoidably; and it is because I knew this that I have so well cared for my person.

## MNESILOCHUS

How, in the gods' name?

## EURIPIDES

Come, leave off badgering him; I was just the same at his age, when I began to write.

MNESILOCHUS

Ah! then, by Zeus! I don't envy you your fine manners.

EURIPIDES (*to AGATHON*)

But listen to the cause that brings me here.

AGATHON

Say on.

EURIPIDES

Agathon, wise is he who can compress many thoughts into few words. Struck by a most cruel misfortune, I come to you as a suppliant.

AGATHON

What are you asking?

EURIPIDES

The women purpose killing me to-day during the Thesmophoria, because I have dared to speak ill of them.

AGATHON

And what can I do for you in the matter?

EURIPIDES

Everything. Mingle secretly with the women by making yourself pass as one of themselves; then do you plead my cause with your own lips, and I am saved. You, and you alone, are capable of speaking of me worthily.

AGATHON

But why not go and defend yourself?

EURIPIDES

Impossible. First of all, I am known; further, I have white hair and a long beard; whereas you, you are good-looking, charming, and are close-shaven; you are fair, delicate, and have a woman's voice.

AGATHON

Euripides!

EURIPIDES

Well?

AGATHON

Have you not said in one of your pieces, "You love to see the light, and don't you believe your father loves it too?"<sup>2</sup>

EURIPIDES

Yes.

AGATHON

Then never you think I am going to expose myself in your stead; it would be madness. It's up to you to submit to the fate that overtakes you; one must not try to trick misfortune, but resign oneself to it with good grace.

MNESILOCHUS

You fairy! That's why your arse is so accessible to lovers.

EURIPIDES

But what prevents your going there?

AGATHON

I should run more risk than you would.

EURIPIDES

Why?

AGATHON

Why? I should look as if I were wanting to trespass on secret nightly pleasures of the women and to rape their Aphrodité.

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

Wanting to rape indeed! you mean wanting to be raped. Ah! great gods! a fine excuse truly!

EURIPIDES

Well then, do you agree?

AGATHON

Don't count upon it.

EURIPIDES

Oh! I am unfortunate indeed! I am undone!

MNESILOCHUS

Euripides, my friend, my son-in-law, never despair.

EURIPIDES

What can be done?

MNESILOCHUS

Send him to the devil and do with me as you like.

EURIPIDES

Very well then, since you devote yourself to my safety, take off your cloak first.

MNESILOCHUS

There, it lies on the ground. But what do you want to do with me?

EURIPIDES

To shave off this beard of yours, and to remove all your other hair as well.

MNESILOCHUS

Do what you think fit; I yield myself entirely to you.

EURIPIDES

Agathon, you always have razors about you; lend me one.

AGATHON

Take it yourself, there, out of that case.

EURIPIDES

Thanks. (*To MNESILOCHUS*) Now sit down and puff out your right cheek.

MNESILOCHUS (*as he is being shaved*)

Ow! Ow! Ow!

EURIPIDES

What are you shouting for? I'll cram a spit down your gullet, if you're not quiet.

MNESILOCHUS

Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! (*He jumps up and starts running away.*)

EURIPIDES

Where are you running to now?

MNESILOCHUS

To the temple of the Eumenides. No, by Demeter! I won't let myself be gashed like that.

EURIPIDES

But you will get laughed at, with your face half-shaven like that.

MNESILOCHUS

Little care I.

EURIPIDES

In the gods' names, don't leave me in the lurch. Come here.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! by the gods! (*He returns reluctantly and resumes his scat.*)

EURIPIDES

Keep still and hold up your head. Why do you want to fidget about like this?

MNESILOCHUS

Mm, mm.

EURIPIDES

Well! why mm, mm? There! it's done and well done too!

MNESILOCHUS

Alas, I shall fight without armour.

EURIPIDES

Don't worry; you look charming. Do you want to see yourself?

MNESILOCHUS

Yes, I do; hand the mirror here.

EURIPIDES

Do you see yourself?

MNESILOCHUS

But this is not I, it is Clithenes!

EURIPIDES

Stand up; I am now going to remove your hair. Bend down.

MNESILOCHUS

Alas! alas! they are going to grill me like a pig.

EURIPIDES

Come now, a torch or a lamp! Bend down and watch out for the tender end of your tool!

MNESILOCHUS

Aye, aye! but I'm afire! oh! oh! Water, water, neighbour, or my perineum will be alight!

EURIPIDES

Keep up your courage!

MNESILOCHUS

Keep my courage, when I'm being burnt up?

EURIPIDES

Come, cease your whining, the worst is over.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! it's quite black, all burnt down there!

EURIPIDES

Don't worry! Satyrus will wash it.

MNESILOCHUS

Woe to him who dares to wash me!

EURIPIDES

Agathon, you refuse to devote yourself to helping me; but at any rate lend me a tunic and a belt. You cannot say you have not got them.

AGATHON

Take them and use them as you like; I consent.

MNESILOCHUS

What shall I take?

EURIPIDES

First put on this long saffron-coloured robe.

MNESILOCHUS

By Aphrodité! what a sweet odour! how it smells of young male tools! Hand it to me quickly. And the belt?

EURIPIDES

Here it is.

MNESILOCHUS

Now some rings for my legs.

EURIPIDES

You still want a hair-net and a head-dress.

AGATHON

Here is my night cap.

EURIPIDES

Ah! that's fine.

MNESILOCHUS

Does it suit me?

AGATHON

It could not be better.

EURIPIDES

And a short mantle?

AGATHON

There's one on the couch; take it.

EURIPIDES

He needs slippers.

AGATHON

Here are mine.

MNESILOCHUS

Will they fit me? (*To AGATHON*) You don't like a loose fit.

AGATHON

Try them on. Now that you have all you need, let me be taken inside.  
(*The eccyclema turns and AGATHON disappears.*)

EURIPIDES

You look for all the world like a woman. But when you talk, take good care to give your voice a woman's tone.

MNESILOCHUS (*falsetto*)

I'll try my best.

EURIPIDES

Come, get yourself to the temple.

MNESILOCHUS

No, by Apollo, not unless you swear to me . . .

EURIPIDES

What?

MNESILOCHUS

. . . that, if anything untoward happen to me, you will leave nothing undone to save me.

EURIPIDES

Very well! I swear it by the Aether, the dwelling-place of the king of the gods.

MNESILOCHUS

Why not rather swear it by the sons of Hippocrates?

EURIPIDES

Come, I swear it by all the gods, both great and small.

MNESILOCHUS

Remember, it's the heart, and not the tongue, that has sworn; <sup>8</sup> for the oaths of the tongue concern me but little.

EURIPIDES

Hurry up! The signal for the meeting has just been raised on the Temple of Demeter. Farewell.

*(They both depart. The scene changes to the interior of the Thesmophorion, where the women who form the chorus are assembled. Mnesilochus enters, in his feminine attire, striving to act as womanly as possible, and giving his voice as female a pitch and lilt as he can; he pretends to be addressing his slave-girl.)*

MNESILOCHUS

Here, Thratta, follow me. Look, Thratta, at the cloud of smoke that arises from all these lighted torches. Ah! beautiful Thesmophorae! grant me your favours, protect me, both within the temple and on my way back! Come, Thratta, put down the basket and take out the cake, which I wish to offer to the two goddesses. Mighty divinity, oh, Demeter, and thou, Persephoné, grant that I may be able to offer you many sacrifices; above all things, grant that I may not be recognized. Would that my well-holed daughter might marry a man as rich as he is foolish and silly, so that she may have nothing to do but amuse herself. But where can a place be found for hearing well? Be off, Thratta, be off; slaves have no right to be present at this gathering.

*(He sits down amongst the women.)*

WOMAN HERALD

Silence! Silence! Pray to the Thesmophorae, Demeter and Cora; pray to Plutus, Calligenia, Curotrophus, the Earth, Hermes and the Graces, that all may happen for the best at this gathering, both for the greatest advantage of Athens and for our own personal happiness! May the award be given her who, by both deeds and words, has most deserved it from the Athenian people and from the women! Address these prayers to heaven and demand happiness for yourselves. Io Paeon! Io Paeon! Let us rejoice!

CHORUS (*singing*)

May the gods deign to accept our vows and our prayers! Oh! almighty Zeus, and thou, god with the golden lyre, who reignest on sacred Delos, and thou, oh, invincible virgin, Pallas, with the eyes of azure and the spear of gold, who protectest our illustrious city,



and thou, the daughter of the beautiful Leto, queen of the forests, who art adored under many names, hasten hither at my call. Come, thou mighty Posidon, king of the Ocean, leave thy stormy whirlpools of Nereus; come, goddesses of the seas, come, ye nymphs, who wander on the mountains. Let us unite our voices to the sounds of the golden lyre, and may wisdom preside at the gathering of the noble matrons of Athens.

#### WOMAN HERALD

Address your prayers to the gods and goddesses of Olympus, of Delphi, Delos and all other places; if there be a man who is plotting against the womenfolk or who, to injure them, is proposing peace to Euripides and the Medes, or who aspires to usurping the tyranny, plots the return of a tyrant, or unmask a supposititious child; or if there be a slave who, a confidential party to a wife's intrigues, reveals them secretly to her husband, or who, entrusted with a message, does not deliver the same faithfully; if there be a lover who fulfils naught of what he has promised a woman, whom he has abused on the strength of his lies; if there be an old woman who seduces the lover of a maiden by dint of her presents and treacherously receives him in her house; if there be a host or hostess who sells false measure, pray the gods that they will overwhelm them with their wrath, both them and their families, and that they may reserve all their favours for you.

#### CHORUS (*singing*)

Let us ask the fulfilment of these wishes both for the city and for the people, and may the wisest of us cause her opinion to be accepted. But woe to those women who break their oaths, who speculate on the public misfortune, who seek to alter the laws and the decrees, who reveal our secrets to the foe and admit the Medes into our territory so that they may devastate it! I declare them both impious and criminal. Oh! almighty Zeus! see to it that the gods protect us, albeit we are but women!

#### WOMAN HERALD

Hearken, all of you! this is the decree passed by the Senate of the Women under the presidency of Timoclea and at the suggestion of Sostaté; it is signed by Lysilla, the secretary: "There will be a gathering of the people on the morning of the third day of the Thesmophoria, which is a day of rest for us; the principal business there shall be the punishment that it is meet to inflict upon Euripides for the insults with which he has loaded us." Now who asks to speak?

#### FIRST WOMAN

I do.

## WOMAN HERALD

First put on this garland, and then speak.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Silence! let all be quiet! Pay attention! for here she is spitting as orators generally do before they begin; no doubt she has much to say.

## FIRST WOMAN

If I have asked to speak, may the goddesses bear me witness, it was not for sake of ostentation. But I have long been pained to see us women insulted by this Euripides, this son of the green-stuff woman,<sup>4</sup> who loads us with every kind of indignity. Has he not hit us enough, calumniated us sufficiently, wherever there are spectators, tragedians, and a chorus? Does he not style us adulterous, lecherous, bibulous, treacherous, and garrulous? Does he not repeat that we are all vice, that we are the curse of our husbands? So that, directly they come back from the theatre, they look at us doubtfully and go searching every nook, fearing there may be some hidden lover. We can do nothing as we used to, so many are the false ideas which he has instilled into our husbands. Is a woman weaving a garland for herself? It's because she is in love. Does she let some vase drop while going or returning to the house? her husband asks her in whose honour she has broken it: "It can only be for that Corinthian stranger." Is a maiden unwell? Straightway her brother says, "That is a colour that does not please me."<sup>5</sup> And if a childless woman wishes to substitute one, the deceit can no longer be a secret, for the neighbours will insist on being present at her delivery. Formerly the old men married young girls, but they have been so calumniated that none think of them now, thanks to that line of his: "A woman is the tyrant of the old man who marries her." Again, it is because of Euripides that we are incessantly watched, that we are shut up behind bolts and bars, and that dogs are kept to frighten off the adulterers. Let that pass; but formerly it was we who had the care of the food, who fetched the flour from the storeroom, the oil and the wine; we can do it no more. Our husbands now carry little Spartan keys on their persons, made with three notches and full of malice and spite. Formerly it sufficed to purchase a ring marked with the same sign for three obols, to open the most securely sealed-up door; but now this pestilent Euripides has taught men to hang seals of worm-eaten wood about their necks.<sup>6</sup> My opinion, therefore, is that we should rid ourselves of our enemy by poison or by any other means, provided he dies. That is what I announce publicly; as to certain points, which I wish to keep secret, I propose to record them on the secretary's minutes.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Never have I listened to a cleverer or more eloquent woman. Everything she says is true; she has examined the matter from all sides and has weighed up every detail. Her arguments are close, varied, and happily chosen. I believe that Xenocles himself, the son of Carcinus, would seem to talk mere nonsense, if placed beside her.

## SECOND WOMAN

I have only a very few words to add, for the last speaker has covered the various points of the indictment; allow me only to tell you what happened to me. My husband died at Cyprus, leaving me five children, whom I had great trouble to bring up by weaving chaplets on the myrtle market. Anyhow, I lived as well as I could until this wretch had persuaded the spectators by his tragedies that there were no gods; since then I have not sold as many chaplets by half. I charge you therefore and exhort you all to punish him, for does he not deserve it in a thousand respects, he who loads you with troubles, who is as coarse toward you as the vegetables upon which his mother reared him? But I must back to the market to weave my chaplets; I have twenty to deliver yet.

CHORUS (*singing*)

This is even more animated and more trenchant than the first speech; all she has just said is full of good sense and to the point; it is clever, clear and well calculated to convince. Yes! we must have striking vengeance on the insults of Euripides.

## MNESILOCHUS

Oh, women! I am not astonished at these outbursts of fiery rage; how could your bile not get inflamed against Euripides, who has spoken so ill of you? As for myself, I hate the man, I swear it by my children; it would be madness not to hate him! Yet, let us reflect a little; we are alone and our words will not be repeated outside. Why be so bent on his ruin? Because he has known and shown up two or three of our faults, when we have a thousand? As for myself, not to speak of other women, I have more than one great sin upon my conscience, but this is the blackest of them. I had been married three days and my husband was asleep by my side; I had a lover, who had seduced me when I was seven years old; impelled by his passion, he came scratching at the door; I understood at once he was there and was going down noiselessly. "Where are you going?" asked my husband. "I am suffering terribly with colic," I told him, "and am going to the can." "Go ahead," he replied, and started pounding together juniper berries, aniseed, and sage. As for myself, I moistened the door-hinge and went to find my lover, who laid me, half-reclining upon Apollo's altar and holding on to the sacred laurel with one hand.

Well now! Consider! that is a thing of which Euripides has never spoken. And when we bestow our favours on slaves and muleteers for want of better, does he mention this? And when we eat garlic early in the morning after a night of wantonness, so that our husband, who has been keeping guard upon the city wall, may be reassured by the smell and suspect nothing, has Euripides ever breathed a word of this? Tell me. Neither has he spoken of the woman who spreads open a large cloak before her husband's eyes to make him admire it in full daylight to conceal her lover by so doing and afford him the means of making his escape. I know another, who for ten whole days pretended to be suffering the pains of labour until she had secured a child; the husband hurried in all directions to buy drugs to hasten her deliverance, and meanwhile an old woman brought the infant in a stew-pot; to prevent its crying she had stopped up its mouth with honey. With a sign she told the wife that she was bringing a child for her, who at once began exclaiming, "Go away, friend, go away, I think I am going to be delivered; I can feel him kicking his heels in the belly . . . of the stew-pot." The husband goes off full of joy, and the old wretch quickly takes the honey out of the child's mouth, which starts crying; then she seizes the baby, runs to the father and tells him with a smile on her face, "It's a lion, a lion, that is born to you; it's your very image. Everything about it is like you, even his little tool, curved like the sky." Are these not our everyday tricks? Why certainly, by Artemis, and we are angry with Euripides, who assuredly treats us no worse than we deserve!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Great gods! where has she unearthed all that? What country gave birth to such an audacious woman? Oh! you wretch! I should not have thought ever a one of us could have spoken in public with such impudence. 'Tis clear, however, that we must expect everything and, as the old proverb says, must look beneath every stone, lest it conceal some orator ready to sting us.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There is but one thing in the world worse than a shameless woman, and that's another woman.

FIRST WOMAN

By Aglaurus! you have lost your wits, friends! You must be bewitched to suffer this plague to belch forth insults against us all. Is there no one has any spirit at all? If not, we and our maid-servants will punish her. Run and fetch coals and let's depilate her in proper style, to teach her not to speak ill of her sex.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! no! not that part of me, my friends. Have we not the right to speak frankly at this gathering? And because I have uttered what I thought right in favour of Euripides, do you want to depilate me for my trouble?

FIRST WOMAN

What! we ought not to punish you, who alone have dared to defend the man who has done so much harm, whom it pleases to put all the vile women that ever were upon the stage, who only shows us Melanippés and Phaedras? But of Penelopé he has never said a word, because she was reputed chaste and good.

MNESILOCHUS

I know the reason. It's because not a single Penelopé exists among the women of to-day, but all without exception are Phaedras.

FIRST WOMAN

Women, you hear how this creature still dares to speak of us all.

MNESILOCHUS

And, Heaven knows, I have not said all that I know. Do you want any more?

FIRST WOMAN

You cannot tell us any more; you have crapped out all you know.

MNESILOCHUS

Why, I have not told the thousandth part of what we women do. Have I said how we use the hollow handles of our brooms to draw up wine unbeknown to our husbands?

FIRST WOMAN

The cursed jade!

MNESILOCHUS

And how we give meats to our pimps at the feast of the Apaturia and then accuse the cat . . .

FIRST WOMAN

You're crazy!

MNESILOCHUS

. . . Have I mentioned the woman who killed her husband with a hatchet? Of another, who caused hers to lose his reason with her potions? And of the Acharnian woman . . .

## FIRST WOMAN

Die, you bitch!

## MNESILOCHUS

. . . who buried her father beneath the bath?

## FIRST WOMAN

And yet we listen to such things!

## MNESILOCHUS

Have I told how you attributed to yourself the male child your slave had just borne and gave her your little daughter?

## FIRST WOMAN

This insult calls for vengeance. Look out for your hair!

## MNESILOCHUS

By Zeus! don't touch me.

FIRST WOMAN (*slapping him*)

There!

MNESILOCHUS (*hitting back*)

There! tit for tat!

## FIRST WOMAN

Hold my cloak, Philista!

## MNESILOCHUS

Come on then, and by Demeter . . .

## FIRST WOMAN

Well! what?

## MNESILOCHUS

. . . I'll make you crap forth the sesame-cake you have eaten.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Stop wrangling! I see a woman running here in hot haste. Keep silent, so that we may hear the better what she has to say.

(*Enter CLISTHENES, dressed as a woman.*)

## CLISTHENES

Friends, whom I copy in all things, my hairless chin sufficiently evidences how dear you are to me; I am women-mad and make myself their champion wherever I am. Just now on the market-place I heard mention of a thing that is of the greatest importance to you; I come to tell it to

you, to let you know it, so that you may watch carefully and be on your guard against the danger which threatens you.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What is it, my child? I can well call you child, for you have so smooth a skin.

CLISTHENES

They say that Euripides has sent an old man here to-day, one of his relations . . .

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

With what object? What is his idea?

CLISTHENES

. . . so that he may hear your speeches and inform him of your deliberations and intentions.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But how would a man fail to be recognized amongst women?

CLISTHENES

Euripides singed and depilated him and disguised him as a woman.

MNESILOCHUS

This is pure invention! What man is fool enough to let himself be depilated? As for myself, I don't believe a word of it.

CLISTHENES

Nonsense! I should not have come here to tell you, if I did not know it on indisputable authority.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Great gods! what is it you tell us! Come, women, let us not lose a moment; let us search and rummage everywhere! Where can this man have hidden himself to escape our notice? Help us to look, Clisthenes; we shall thus owe you double thanks, dear friend.

CLISTHENES

Well then! let us see. To begin with you; who are you?

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

Wherever am I to stow myself?

CLISTHENES

Each and every one must pass the scrutiny.

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

Oh! great gods!

FIRST WOMAN

You ask me who I am? I am the wife of Cleonymus.

CLISTHENES (*to the LEADER OF THE CHORUS*)

Do you know this woman?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yes, yes, pass on to the rest.

CLISTHENES

And she who carries the child?

FIRST WOMAN

Surely; she's my nurse.

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

This is the end.

*(He runs off.)*

CLISTHENES

Hi! you there! where are you going? Stop. What are you running away for?

MNESILOCHUS (*dancing on one leg*)

I want to take a pee, you brazen thing.

CLISTHENES

Well, be quick about it; I shall wait for you here.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Wait for her and examine her closely; she's the only one we do not know.

CLISTHENES

That's a long leak you're taking.

MNESILOCHUS

God, yes; I am constricted; I ate some cress yesterday.

CLISTHENES

What are you chattering about cress? Come here and be quick.

*(He starts to pull MNESILOCHUS back.)*

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! don't pull a poor sick woman about like that.



CLISTHENES (*looking MNESILOCHUS square in the eye*)  
Tell me, who is your husband?

MNESILOCHUS (*embarrassed*)  
My husband? Do you know a certain individual at Cothocidae . . . ?

CLISTHENES  
Whom do you mean? Give his name.

MNESILOCHUS  
He's an individual to whom the son of a certain individual one day . . .

CLISTHENES  
You are drivelling! Let's see, have you ever been here before?

MNESILOCHUS  
Why certainly, every year.

CLISTHENES  
Who is your tent companion?

MNESILOCHUS  
A certain . . . Oh! my god!

CLISTHENES  
That's not an answer!

FIRST WOMAN  
Withdraw, all of you; I am going to examine her thoroughly about last year's mysteries. But move away, Clisthenes, for no man may hear what is going to be said. Now answer my questions! What was done first?

MNESILOCHUS  
Let's see now. What was done first? Oh! we drank.

FIRST WOMAN  
And then?

MNESILOCHUS  
We drank to our healths.

FIRST WOMAN  
You will have heard that from someone. And then?

MNESILOCHUS  
Xenylla asked for a cup; there wasn't any thunder-mug.

FIRST WOMAN

You're talking nonsense. Here, Clisthenes, here! This is the man you were telling us about.

CLISTHENES

What shall we do with him?

FIRST WOMAN

Take off his clothes, I can get nothing out of him.

MNEILOCHUS

What! are you going to strip a mother of nine children naked?

CLISTHENES

Come, undo your girdle, you shameless thing.

FIRST WOMAN

Ah! what a sturdy frame! but she has no breasts like we have.

MNEILOCHUS

That's because I'm barren. I never had any children.

FIRST WOMAN

Oh! indeed! just now you were the mother of nine.

CLISTHENES

Stand up straight. What do you keep pushing that thing down for?

FIRST WOMAN (*peering from behind*)

There's no mistaking it.

CLISTHENES (*also peering from behind*)

Where has it gone to now?

FIRST WOMAN

To the front.

CLISTHENES (*from in front*)

No.

FIRST WOMAN (*from behind*)

Ah! it's behind now.

CLISTHENES

Why, friend, it's just like the Isthmus; you keep pulling your stick backwards and forwards more often than the Corinthians do their ships.

## FIRST WOMAN

Ah! the wretch! this is why he insulted us and defended Euripides.

## MNESILOCHUS

Aye, wretch indeed, what troubles have I not got into now!

## FIRST WOMAN

What shall we do?

## CLISTHENES

Watch him closely, so that he does not escape. As for me, I'll go to report the matter to the magistrates.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us kindle our lamps; let us go firmly to work and with courage, let us take off our cloaks and search whether some other man has not come here too; let us pass round the whole Pnyx,<sup>7</sup> examine the tents and the passages. Come, be quick, let us start off on a light toe and rummage all round in silence. Let us hasten, let us finish our round as soon as possible.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Look quickly for the traces that might show you a man hidden here, let your glance fall on every side; look well to the right and to the left. If we seize some impious fellow, woe to him! He will know how we punish the outrage, the crime, the sacrilege. The criminal will then acknowledge at last that gods exist; his fate will teach all men that the deities must be revered, that justice must be observed and that they must submit to the sacred laws. If not, then woe to them! Heaven itself will punish sacrilege; being aflame with fury and mad with frenzy, all their deeds will prove to mortals, both men and women, that the deity punishes injustice and impiety, and that she is not slow to strike.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But I think I have now searched everywhere and that no other man is hidden among us.

## FIRST WOMAN

Where are you flying to? Stop! stop! Ah! miserable woman that I am, he has torn my child from my breast and has disappeared with it.

## MNESILOCHUS

Scream as loud as you will, but you'll never feed him again. If you do not let me go this very instant, I am going to cut open the veins of his thighs with this cutlass and his blood shall flow over the altar.

## FIRST WOMAN

Oh! great gods! oh! friends, help me! terrify him with your shrieks, triumph over this monster, permit him not to rob me of my only child.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! oh! venerable Moirai, what fresh attack is this? It's the crowning act of audacity and shamelessness! What has he done now, friends, what has he done?

## MNESILOCHUS

Ah! your insolence passes all bounds, but I know how to curb it!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What a shameful deed! the measure of his iniquities is full!

## FIRST WOMAN

Aye, it's shameful that he should have robbed me of my child.

CHORUS (*singing*)

It's past belief to be so criminal and so impudent!

MNESILOCHUS (*singing*)

Ah! you're not near the end of it yet.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Little I care whence you come; you shall not return to boast of having acted so odiously with impunity, for you shall be punished.

MNESILOCHUS (*speaking*)

You won't do it, by the gods!

CHORUS (*singing*)

And what immortal would protect you for your crime?

MNESILOCHUS (*speaking*)

You talk in vain! I shall not let go the child.

CHORUS (*singing*)

By the goddesses, you will not laugh presently over your crime and your impious speech. For with impiety, as 'tis meet, shall we reply to your impiety. Soon fortune will turn round and overwhelm you.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come there, bring some firewood. Let's roast the wretch as quickly as we can.

## FIRST WOMAN

Bring faggots, Mania! (*To MNESILOCHUS*) You will be nothing but charcoal soon.

## MNESILOCHUS

Grill away, roast me, but you, my child, take off this Cretan robe and blame no one but your mother for your death. But what does this mean? The little girl is nothing but a skin filled with wine and shod with Persian slippers. Oh! you wanton, you tippling women, who think of nothing but wine; you are a fortune to the drinking-shops and are our ruin; for the sake of drink, you neglect both your household and your shuttle!

## FIRST WOMAN

Faggots, Mania, plenty of them.

## MNESILOCHUS

Bring as many as you like. But answer me; are you the mother of this brat?

## FIRST WOMAN

I carried it ten months.

## MNESILOCHUS

You carried it?

## FIRST WOMAN

I swear it by Artemis.

## MNESILOCHUS

How much does it hold? Three cotylæ? Tell me.

## FIRST WOMAN

Oh! what have you done? You have stripped the poor child quite naked, and it is so small, so small.

## MNESILOCHUS

So small?

## FIRST WOMAN

Yes, quite small, to be sure.

## MNESILOCHUS

How old is it? Has it seen the feast of cups thrice or four times?

## FIRST WOMAN

It was born about the time of the last Dionysia. But give it back to me.

MNESILOCHUS

No, may Apollo bear me witness.

FIRST WOMAN

Well, then we are going to burn him.

MNESILOCHUS

Burn me, but then I shall rip this open instantly.

FIRST WOMAN

No, no, I adjure you, don't; do anything you like to me rather than that.

MNESILOCHUS

What a tender mother you are; but nevertheless I shall rip it open.  
*(He tears open the wine-skin.)*

FIRST WOMAN

Oh, my beloved daughter! Mania, hand me the sacred cup, that I may at least catch the blood of my child.

MNESILOCHUS

Hold it below; that's the only favour I grant you.  
*(He pours the wine into the cup.)*

FIRST WOMAN

Out upon you, you pitiless monster!

MNESILOCHUS

This robe belongs to the priestess.

SECOND WOMAN

What belongs to the priestess?

MNESILOCHUS

Here, take it.

*(He throws her the Cretan robe.)*

SECOND WOMAN

Ah! unfortunate Mica! Who has robbed you of your daughter, your beloved child?

FIRST WOMAN

That wretch. But as you are here, watch him well, while I go with Clisthenes to the Magistrates and denounce him for his crimes.

## MNESILOCHUS

Ah! how can I secure safety? what device can I hit on? what can I think of? He whose fault it is, he who hurried me into this trouble, will not come to my rescue. Let me see, whom could I best send to him? Ha! I know a means taken from *Palamedes*; like him, I will write my misfortune on some oars, which I will cast into the sea. Where might I find some oars? Hah! what if I took these statues instead of oars, wrote upon them and then threw them towards this side and that. That's the best thing to do. Besides, like oars they are of wood.

(*singing*)

Oh! my hands, keep up your courage, for my safety is at stake. Come, my beautiful tablets, receive the traces of my stylus and be the messengers of my sorry fate. Oh! oh! this R looks miserable enough! Where is it running to then? Come, off with you in all directions, to the right and to the left; and hurry yourselves, for there's much need indeed!

(*He sits down to wait for Euripides. The Chorus turns and faces the audience.*)

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us address ourselves to the spectators to sing our praises, despite the fact that each one says much ill of women. If the men are to be believed, we are a plague to them; through us come all their troubles, quarrels, disputes, sedition, griefs and wars. But if we are truly such a pest, why marry us? Why forbid us to go out or show ourselves at the window? You want to keep this pest, and take a thousand cares to do it. If your wife goes out and you meet her away from the house, you fly into a fury. Ought you not rather to rejoice and give thanks to the gods? for if the pest has disappeared, you will no longer find it at home. If we fall asleep at friends' houses from the fatigue of playing and sporting, each of you comes prowling round the bed to contemplate the features of this pest. If we seat ourselves at the window, each one wants to see the pest, and if we withdraw through modesty, each wants all the more to see the pest perch herself there again. It is thus clear that we are better than you, and the proof of this is easy. Let us find out which is the worse of the two sexes. We say, "It's you," while you aver, "it's we." Come, let us compare them in detail, each individual man with a woman. Charminus is not equal to Nausimaché, that's certain. Cleophon is in every respect inferior to Salabaccho. It's a long time now since any of you has dared to contest the prize with Aristomaché, the heroine of Marathon, or with Stratonicé.

Among the last year's Senators, who have just yielded their office to other citizens, is there one who equals Eubulé? Not even Anytus would

say that. Therefore we maintain that men are greatly our inferiors. You see no woman who has robbed the state of fifty talents rushing about the city in a magnificent chariot; our greatest peculations are a measure of corn, which we steal from our husbands, and even then we return it them the very same day. But we could name many amongst you who do quite as much, and who are, even more than ourselves, gluttons, parasites, cheats and kidnappers of slaves. We know how to keep our property better than you. We still have our cylinders, our beams, our baskets and our sunshades; whereas many among you have lost the wood of your spears as well as the iron, and many others have cast away their bucklers on the battlefield.

There are many reproaches we have the right to bring against men. The most serious is this, that the woman, who has given birth to a useful citizen, whether taxiarch or strategus should receive some distinction; a place of honour should be reserved for her at the Stenia, the Scirophoria, and the other festivals that we keep. On the other hand, she of whom a coward was born or a worthless man, a bad trierarch or an unskilful pilot, should sit with shaven head, behind her sister who had borne a brave man. Oh! citizens! is it just that the mother of Hyperbolus should sit dressed in white and with loosened tresses beside that of Lamachus and lend out money on usury? He, who may have made a deal of this nature with her, so far from paying her interest, should not even repay the capital, saying, "What, pay you interest? after you have given us this delightful son?"

#### MNESILOCHUS

I have contracted quite a squint by looking round for him, and yet Euripides does not come. Who is keeping him? No doubt he is ashamed of his cold Palamedes. What will attract him? Let us see! By which of his pieces does he set most store? Ah! I'll imitate his Helen, his last-born. I just happen to have a complete woman's outfit.

#### SECOND WOMAN

What are you ruminating about now? Why are you rolling up your eyes? You'll have no reason to be proud of your Helen, if you don't keep quiet until one of the Magistrates arrives.

#### MNESILOCHUS (*as Helen*)

"These shores are those of the Nile with the beautiful nymphs, these waters take the place of heaven's rain and fertilize the white earth, that produces the black syrmea."

#### SECOND WOMAN

By bright Hecaté, you're a cunning varlet.



## MNESILOCHUS

"Glorious Sparta is my country and Tyndareus is my father."

## SECOND WOMAN

He your father, you rascal! Why, it's Phrynonidas.

## MNESILOCHUS

"I was given the name of Helen."

## SECOND WOMAN

What! you are again becoming a woman, before we have punished you for having pretended it the first time!

## MNESILOCHUS

"A thousand warriors have died on my account on the banks of the Scamander."

## SECOND WOMAN

Would that you had done the same!

## MNESILOCHUS

"And here I am upon these shores; Menelaus, my unhappy husband, does not yet come. Ah! Why do I still live?"

## SECOND WOMAN

Because of the criminal negligence of the crows!

## MNESILOCHUS

"But what sweet hope is this that sets my heart a-throb? Oh, Zeus! grant it may not prove a lying one!"

(EURIPIDES *enters.*)

EURIPIDES (*as Menelaus*)

"To what master does this splendid palace belong? Will he welcome strangers who have been tried on the billows of the sea by storm and shipwreck?"

## MNESILOCHUS

"This is the palace of Proteus."

## SECOND WOMAN

Of what Proteus? you thriced cursed rascal! how he lies! By the goddesses, it's ten years since Proteas died.

## EURIPIDES

"What is this shore whither the wind has driven our boat?"

MNESILOCHUS

" 'Tis Egypt."

EURIPIDES

"Alas! how far we are from own country!"

SECOND WOMAN

Don't believe that cursed fool. This is Demeter's Temple.

EURIPIDES

"Is Proteus in these parts?"

SECOND WOMAN

Ah, now, stranger, it must be sea-sickness that makes you so distraught! You have been told that Proteas is dead, and yet you ask if he is in these parts.

EURIPIDES

"He is no more! Oh! woe! where lie his ashes?"

MNESILOCHUS

" 'Tis on his tomb you see me sitting."

SECOND WOMAN

You call an altar a tomb! Beware of the rope!

EURIPIDES

"And why remain sitting on this tomb, wrapped in this long veil, oh, stranger lady?"

MNESILOCHUS

"They want to force me to marry a son of Proteus."

SECOND WOMAN

Ah! wretch, why tell such shameful lies? Stranger, this is a rascal who has slipped in amongst us women to rob us of our trinkets

MNESILOCHUS (*to* SECOND WOMAN)

"Shout! load me with your insults, for little care I "

EURIPIDES

"Who is the old woman who reviles you, stranger lady?"

MNESILOCHUS

" 'Tis Theonoé, the daughter of Proteus."

## SECOND WOMAN

I! Why, my name's Crityllé, the daughter of Antitheus, of the deme of Gargettus; as for you, you are a rogue.

## MNESILOCHUS

"Your entreaties are vain. Never shall I wed your brother; never shall I betray the faith I owe my husband, Menelaus, who is fighting before Troy."

## EURIPIDES

"What are you saying? Turn your face towards me."

## MNESILOCHUS

"I dare not; my cheeks show the marks of the insults I have been forced to suffer."

## EURIPIDES

"Oh! great gods! I cannot speak, for very emotion. . . . Ah! what do I see? Who are you?"

## MNESILOCHUS

"And you, what is your name? for my surprise is as great as yours."

## EURIPIDES

"Are you Grecian or born in this country?"

## MNESILOCHUS

"I am Grecian. But now your name, what is it?"

## EURIPIDES

"Oh! how you resemble Helen!"

## MNESILOCHUS

"And you Menelaus, if I can judge by these pot-herbs." <sup>4</sup>

## EURIPIDES

"You are not mistaken, 'tis none other than that unfortunate mortal who stands before you."

## MNESILOCHUS

"Ah! how you have delayed coming to your wife's arms! Press me to your heart, throw your arms about me, for I wish to cover you with kisses. Carry me away, carry me away, quick, quick, far, very far from here."

## SECOND WOMAN

By the goddesses, woe to him who would carry you away! I should thrash him with my torch.

EURIPIDES

"Do you propose to prevent me from taking my wife, the daughter of Tyndareus, to Sparta?"

SECOND WOMAN

You seem to me to be a cunning rascal too; you are in collusion with this man, and it wasn't for nothing that you kept babbling about Egypt. But the hour for punishment has come; here is the Magistrate with his Scythian.

EURIPIDES

This is getting awkward. Let me hide myself.

MNESILOCHUS

And what is to become of me, poor unfortunate man that I am?

EURIPIDES

Don't worry. I shall never abandon you, as long as I draw breath and one of my numberless artifices remains untried.

MNESILOCHUS

The fish has not bitten this time.

*(A MAGISTRATE enters, accompanied by a Scythian policeman.)*

MAGISTRATE

Is this the rascal Clisthenes told us about? Why are you trying to make yourself so small? Officer, arrest him, fasten him to the post, then take up your position there and keep guard over him. Let none approach him. A sound lash with your whip for him who attempts to break the order.

SECOND WOMAN

Excellent, for just now a rogue almost took him from me.

MNESILOCHUS

Magistrate, in the name of that hand which you know so well how to bend when money is placed in it, grant me a slight favour before I die.

MAGISTRATE

What favour?

MNESILOCHUS

Order the archer to strip me before lashing me to the post; the crows, when they make their meal on the poor old man, would laugh too much at this robe and head-dress.

## MAGISTRATE

It is in that gear that you must be exposed by order of the Senate, so that your crime may be patent to the passers-by.

(*He departs.*)

MNESILOCHUS (*as the SCYTHIAN seizes him*)

Oh! cursed robe, the cause of all my misfortune! My last hope is thus destroyed!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us now devote ourselves to the sports which the women are accustomed to celebrate here, when time has again brought round the mighty Mysteries of the great goddesses, the sacred days which Pauson himself honours by fasting and would wish feast to succeed feast, that he might keep them all holy. Spring forward with a light step, whirling in mazy circles; let your hands interlace, let the eager and rapid dancers sway to the music and glance on every side as they move.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Let the chorus sing likewise and praise the Olympian gods in their pious transport. It's wrong to suppose that, because I am a woman and in this temple, I am going to speak ill of men; but since we want something fresh, we are going through the rhythmic steps of the round dance for the first time.

Start off while you sing to the god of the lyre and to the chaste goddess armed with the bow. Hail! thou god who flingest thy darts so far, grant us the victory! The homage of our song is also due to Heré, the goddess of marriage, who interests herself in every chorus and guards the approach to the nuptial couch. I also pray Hermes, the god of the shepherds, and Pan and the beloved Graces to bestow a benevolent smile upon our songs.

Let us lead off anew, let us double our zeal during our solemn days, and especially let us observe a close fast; let us form fresh measures that keep good time, and may our songs resound to the very heavens. Do thou, oh divine Bacchus, who art crowned with ivy, direct our chorus; 'tis to thee that both my hymns and my dances are dedicated; oh, Evius, oh, Bromius, oh, thou son of Semelé, oh, Bacchus, who delightest to mingle with the dear choruses of the nymphs upon the mountains, and who repeatest, while dancing with them, the sacred hymn, *Euios, Euios, Euoi!* Echo, the nymph of Cithaeron, returns thy words, which resound beneath the dark vaults of the thick foliage and in the midst of the rocks of the forest; the ivy enlaces thy brow with its tendrils charged with flowers.

SCYTHIAN (*he speaks with a heavy foreign accent*)

You shall stay here in the open air to wail.

MNESILOCHUS

Archer, I adjure you.

SCYTHIAN

You're wasting your breath.

MNESILOCHUS

Loosen the wedge a little.

SCYTHIAN

Aye, certainly.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! by the gods' why, you are driving it in tighter.

SCYTHIAN

Is that enough?

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! Oh! Ow! Ow! May the plague take you!

SCYTHIAN

Silence! you cursed old wretch! I am going to get a mat to lie upon, so as to watch you close at hand at my ease.

MNESILOCHUS

Ah! what exquisite pleasures Euripides is securing for me! But, oh, ye gods! oh, Zeus the Deliverer, all is not yet lost! I don't believe him the man to break his word; I just caught sight of him appearing in the form of Perseus, and he told me with a mysterious sign to turn myself into Andromeda. And in truth am I not really bound? It's certain, then, that he is coming to my rescue; for otherwise he would not have steered his flight this way.

(*As Andromeda, singing*)

Oh Nymphs, ye virgins who are so dear to me, how am I to approach him? how can I escape the sight of this Scythian? And Echo, thou who reignest in the inmost recesses of the caves, oh! favour my cause and permit me to approach my spouse. A pitiless ruffian has chained up the most unfortunate of mortal maids. Alas! I had barely escaped the filthy claws of an old fury, when another mischance overtook me! This Scythian does not take his eye off me and he has exposed me as food for the crows. Alas! what is to become of me, alone here and without friends! I am not seen mingling in the dances nor in

the games of my companions, but heavily loaded with fetters I am given over to the voracity of a Glaucetes. Sing no bridal hymn for me, oh women, but rather the hymn of captivity, and in tears. Ah! how I suffer! great gods! how I suffer! Alas! alas! and through my own relatives too! My misery would make Tartarus dissolve into tears! Alas! in my terrible distress, I implore the mortal who first shaved me and depilated me, then dressed me in this long robe, and then sent me to this Temple into the midst of the women, to save me. Oh! thou pitiless Fate! I am then accursed, great gods! Ah! who would not be moved at the sight of the appalling tortures under which I succumb? Would that the blazing shaft of the lightning would wither . . . this barbarian for me! The immortal light has no further charm for my eyes since I have been descending the shortest path to the dead, tied up, strangled, and maddened with pain.

(*In the following scene EURIPIDES, from off stage, impersonates Echo.*)

EURIPIDES

Hail! beloved girl. As for your father, Cepheus, who has exposed you in this guise, may the gods annihilate him.

MNESILOCHUS

And who are you whom my misfortunes have moved to pity?

EURIPIDES

I am Echo, the nymph who repeats all she hears. It was I, who last year lent my help to Euripides in this very place. But, my child, give yourself up to the sad laments that belong to your pitiful condition.

MNESILOCHUS

And you will repeat them?

EURIPIDES

I will not fail you. Begin.

MNESILOCHUS (*singing*)

"Oh! thou divine Night! how slowly thy chariot threads its way through the starry vault, across the sacred realms of the Air and mighty Olympus."

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

Mighty Olympus.

MNESILOCHUS (*singing*)

"Why is it necessary that Andromeda should have all the woes for her share?"

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

For her share.

MNESILOCHUS (*speaking*)

"Sad death!"

EURIPIDES

Sad death!

MNESILOCHUS

You weary me, old babbler.

EURIPIDES

Old babbler.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! you are too unbearable.

EURIPIDES

Unbearable.

MNESILOCHUS

Friend, let me talk by myself. Do please let me. Come, that's enough.

EURIPIDES

That's enough.

MNESILOCHUS

Go and hang yourself!

EURIPIDES

Go and hang yourself!

MNESILOCHUS

What a plague!

EURIPIDES

What a plague!

MNESILOCHUS

Cursed brute!

EURIPIDES

Cursed brute!

MNESILOCHUS

Beware of blows!



EURIPIDES

Beware of blows!

SCYTHIAN

Hullo! what are you jabbering about?

EURIPIDES

What are you jabbering about?

SCYTHIAN

I shall go and call the Magistrates.

EURIPIDES

I shall go and call the Magistrates.

SCYTHIAN

This is odd!

EURIPIDES

This is odd!

SCYTHIAN

Whence comes this voice?

EURIPIDES

Whence comes this voice?

SCYTHIAN

You are mad.

EURIPIDES

You are mad.

SCYTHIAN

Ah! beware!

EURIPIDES

Ah! beware!

SCYTHIAN (*to MNESILOCHUS*)

Are you mocking me?

EURIPIDES

Are you mocking me?

MNESILOCHUS

No, it's this woman, who stands near you.

EURIPIDES

Who stands near you.

SCYTHIAN

Where is the hussy!

MNESILOCHUS

She's running away.

SCYTHIAN

Where are you running to?

EURIPIDES

Where are you running to?

SCYTHIAN

You shall not get away.

EURIPIDES

You shall not get away.

SCYTHIAN

You are chattering still?

EURIPIDES

You are chattering still?

SCYTHIAN

Stop the hussy.

EURIPIDES

Stop the hussy.

SCYTHIAN

What a babbling, cursed woman!

*(EURIPIDES now enters, costumed as Perseus.)*

EURIPIDES

"Oh! ye gods! to what barbarian land has my swift flight taken me?  
I am Perseus; I cleave the plains of the air with my winged feet, and I  
am carrying the Gorgon's head to Argos."

SCYTHIAN

What, are you talking about the head of Gorgos, the scribe?

EURIPIDES

No, I am speaking of the head of the Gorgon.

SCYTHIAN

Why, yes! of Gorgos!

EURIPIDES

"But what do I behold? A young maiden, beautiful as the immortals, chained to this rock like a vessel in port?"

MNEILOCHUS

"Take pity on me, oh stranger! I am so unhappy and distraught! Free me from these bonds."

SCYTHIAN

You keep still! a curse upon your impudence! you are going to die, and yet you will be chattering!

EURIPIDES

"Oh! virgin! I take pity on your chains."

SCYTHIAN

But this is no virgin; he's an old rogue, a cheat and a thief.

EURIPIDES

You have lost your wits, Scythian. This is Andromeda, the daughter of Cepheus.

SCYTHIAN (*lifting up MNEILOCHUS' robe*)

But look at his tool; it's pretty big.

EURIPIDES

Give me your hand, that I may descend near this young maiden. Each man has his own particular weakness; as for me I am aflame with love for this virgin.

SCYTHIAN

Oh! I'm not jealous; and as he has his arse turned this way, why, I don't care if you make love to him.

EURIPIDES

"Ah! let me release her, and hasten to join her on the bridal couch."

SCYTHIAN

If you are so eager to make the old man, you can bore through the plank, and so get at him.

EURIPIDES

No, I will break his bonds.

SCYTHIAN

Beware of my lash!

EURIPIDES

No matter.

SCYTHIAN

This blade shall cut off your head.

EURIPIDES

"Ah! what can be done? what arguments can I use? This savage will understand nothing! The newest and most cunning fancies are a dead letter to the ignorant. Let us invent some artifice to fit in with his coarse nature."

*(He departs.)*

SCYTHIAN

I can see the rascal is trying to outwit me.

MNESILOCHUS

Ah! Perseus! remember in what condition you are leaving me.

SCYTHIAN

Are you wanting to feel my lash again!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! Pallas, who art fond of dances, hasten hither at my call. Oh! thou chaste virgin, the protectress of Athens, I call thee in accordance with the sacred rites, thee, whose evident protection we adore and who keepest the keys of our city in thy hands. Do thou appear, thou whose just hatred has overturned our tyrants. The womenfolk are calling thee; hasten hither at their bidding along with Peace, who shall restore the festivals. And ye, august goddesses, display a smiling and propitious countenance to our gaze; come into your sacred grove, the entry to which is forbidden to men; 'tis there in the midst of the sacred orgies that we contemplate your divine features. Come, appear, we pray it of you, oh, venerable Thesmophorae! If you have ever answered our appeal, oh! come into our midst.

*(During this ode the SCYTHIAN falls asleep. At the end of it EURIPIDES returns, thinly disguised as an old procuress; the CHORUS recognizes him, the SCYTHIAN does not; he carries a harp, and is followed by a dancing girl and a young flute-girl.)*

EURIPIDES

Women, if you will be reconciled with me, I am willing, and I undertake never to say anything ill of you in future. Those are my proposals for peace.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And what impels you to make these overtures?

EURIPIDES (*to the* CHORUS)

This unfortunate man, who is chained to the post, is my father-in-law; if you will restore him to me, you will have no more cause to complain of me; but if not, I shall reveal your pranks to your husbands when they return from the war.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We accept peace, but there is this barbarian whom you must buy over.

## EURIPIDES

I'll take care of that. Come, my little wench, bear in mind what I told you on the road and do it well. Come, go past him and gird up your robe. And you, you little dear, play us the air of a Persian dance.

SCYTHIAN (*waking*)

What is this music that makes me so blithe?

## EURIPIDES

Scythian, this young girl is going to practise some dances, which she has to perform at a feast presently.

## SCYTHIAN

Very well! let her dance and practise; I won't hinder her. How nimbly she bounds! just like a flea on a fleece.

## EURIPIDES

Come, my dear, off with your robe and seat yourself on the Scythian's knee; stretch forth your feet to me, that I may take off your slippers.

## SCYTHIAN

Ah! yes, seat yourself, my little girl, ah! yes, to be sure. What a firm little titty! it's just like a turnip.

EURIPIDES (*to the flute-girl*)

An air on the flute, quick! Are you afraid of the Scythian?

## SCYTHIAN

What a nice arse! Hold still, won't you? A nice twat, too.

## EURIPIDES

That's so! (*To the dancing girl*) Resume your dress, it is time to be going.

SCYTHIAN

Give me a kiss.

EURIPIDES

Come, give him a kiss.

SCYTHIAN

Oh! oh! oh! my god, what soft lips! like Attic honey. But might she not stay with me?

EURIPIDES

Impossible, officer; good evening.

SCYTHIAN

Oh! oh! old woman, do me this pleasure.

EURIPIDES

Will you give a drachma?

SCYTHIAN

Aye, that I will.

EURIPIDES

Hand over the money.

SCYTHIAN

I have not got it, but take my quiver in pledge. I'll bring her back. (*To the dancing girl*) Follow me, my fine young wench. Old woman, you keep an eye on this man. But what's your name?

EURIPIDES

Artemisia.

SCYTHIAN

I'll remember it. Artemuxia.

(*He takes the dancing girl away.*)

EURIPIDES (*aside*)

Hermes, god of cunning, receive my thanks! everything is turning out for the best. (*To the flute-girl*) As for you, friend, go along with them. Now let me loose his bonds. (*To MNESILOCHUS*) And you, directly I have released you, take to your legs and run off full tilt to your home to find your wife and children.

MNESILOCHUS

I shall not fail in that as soon as I am free.

EURIPIDES (*releasing MNESILOCHUS*)

There! It's done. Come, fly, before the Scythian lays his hand on you again.

## MNESILOCHUS

That's just what I am doing.

(*Both depart in haste.*)

SCYTHIAN (*returning*)

Ah! old woman! what a charming little girl! Not at all a prude, and so obliging! Eh! where is the old woman? Ah! I am undone! And the old man, where is he? Hi, old woman, old woman! Ah! but this is a dirty trick! Artemuxia! she has tricked me, that's what the little old woman has done! Get clean out of my sight, you cursed quiver! (*Picks it up and throws it across the stage.*) Ha! you are well named quiver, for you have made me quiver indeed. Oh! what's to be done? Where is the old woman then? Artemuxia!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Are you asking for the old woman who carried the lyre?

## SCYTHIAN

Yes, yes; have you seen her?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

She has gone that way along with the old man.

## SCYTHIAN

Dressed in a long robe?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yes; run quick, and you will overtake them.

## SCYTHIAN

Ah! rascally old woman! Which way has she fled? Artemuxia!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Straight on; follow your nose. But, hi! where are you running to now? Come back, you are going exactly the wrong way.

## SCYTHIAN

Ye gods! ye gods! and all this while Artemuxia is escaping.

(*He runs off.*)

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Go your way! and a pleasant journey to you! But our sports have lasted long enough; it is time for each of us to be off home; and may the two goddesses reward us for our labours!

#### NOTES FOR THE THESMOPHORIAZUSAE

1. This ejaculation and its exaggerated form two lines below are probably meant to convey Mnesilochus' mock wonder at the magnificent sounds of Agathon's verses.

2. A quotation from Euripides' *Alcestis* (691).

3. The wretched tragedian was never allowed to forget this infamous line from *Hippolytus* (612).

4. Aristophanes never tires of twitting Euripides with the fact or fancy that his mother had sold vegetables.

5. The implication is that her brother thinks her to be with child.

6. The women would break the seals that their husbands had placed on the doors and then duplicate them on their return; the worm-eaten wood was far more difficult to copy.

7. The women are now speaking as if they were holding a regular popular Assembly, on the Pnyx.



IX  
THE FROGS

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

THE GOD DIONYSUS

XANTHIAS, *his slave*

AESCHYLUS

EURIPIDES

HERACLES

PLUTO

CHARON

AEACUS

A SERVANT OF PLUTO

A CORPSE

A MAIDSERVANT OF PERSEPHONE

A LANDLADY *in Hades*

PLATHANÉ, *her servant*

CHORUS OF FROGS

CHORUS OF INITIATED PERSONS

## INTRODUCTION

AT the Lenaeon festival of 405, six years after the performance of *The Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes produced *The Frogs*, which was awarded the highest prize. The subject of the play is almost wholly literary and its treatment contains astonishingly few passages that can arouse the antipathy of the puritan. It has consequently enjoyed a modern popularity entirely out of proportion to its rather slender merits. Poorly constructed and deficient in wit, it exhibits a solemnity of manner and a thinness of spirit hardly to be expected from the author of *The Birds* and *The Thesmophoriazusae*.

Dionysus, the patron god of tragedy, has deeply mourned the recent death of Euripides, and his nostalgic yearning for the "clever rogue" has finally grown so intense that he has resolved to go down to Hades and bring him back to earth again; the play opens at the commencement of this arduous journey. Since no one but Heracles has ever accomplished such a feat before, Dionysus has acquired a club and slipped a lion's skin over his saffron robe, and in this ludicrous costume he knocks at the house of the very hero he plans to emulate, and obtains advice and directions. With his slave Xanthias accompanying him he soon reaches the Acherusian lake and is ferried across by Charon while the Chorus of Frogs sings lyrics of the rain and the marshes. Xanthias has had to walk around the lake, but he meets his master on the other side, and shortly the real Chorus of the play, composed of initiates into the Mysteries, appears. From them Dionysus learns that he has already reached the house of Pluto, and he knocks at the door. A series of foolish and not overly amusing incidents ensues, in which the costume of Heracles alternately arouses the wrath and elicits the blandishments of the enemies and the friends acquired by that hero on his previous visit to the underworld. The former sort of reception induces Dionysus to place the lion's skin on the shoulders of Xanthias, while the latter causes him quickly to abrogate this arrangement. Eventually they enter the house and the stage is left to the Chorus, which delivers the parabasis.

The ode praises the Athenians and makes a gibe at the demagogue Cleophon. The epirrheme gives the spectators the sound and bold advice

that they should restore the oligarchical revolutionaries of 411 to the rights of citizenship. The antode attacks a little known person by the name of Cligenes, and the antepirrhome compliments the advice of the epirrhome. There are no anapests. The tone of the parabasis is fervently patriotic, and this will doubtless have been the reason for the unique repetition of the play, a few days after its regular performance, in response to popular demand.

At the conclusion of the parabasis Aeacus, the slave of Pluto, and Xanthias emerge from the house and are engaging in friendly conversation, when a great commotion is heard offstage. In this way the poet introduces the famous and lengthy contest between Aeschylus and Euripides which occupies the whole of the latter portion of the comedy. The connection of this with what precedes is so loose that some scholars have been led into the assumption that it was originally composed for an entirely different play and was hurriedly tacked on to the unfinished *Frogs* at the news of the death of Euripides. Dionysus now abandons or forgets the original purpose for which he has come to Hades and announces that the winner of the contest will be the poet whom he will take back to Athens. With their patron god sitting as judge, the two tragedians compare their talents in every department of dramatic art. The fundamental notion of the scene is a happy one, but it is longer than its essential humour allows, and the parodies of Aeschylus are inept and misdirected. The contest is extremely close, and Dionysus experiences great difficulty in arriving at a decision; "My choice shall fall on him my soul desires," he finally says, and we remember that it was his ardent and insatiable craving for Euripides that brought him to the underworld. Thus we are greatly surprised when it turns out to be Aeschylus that he wishes to restore to the light of day. Is this the poet's intent, or is it merely another example of the carelessness with which the play is constructed?

The person and the poetry of Euripides bulk large in the plays of Aristophanes, and the comic poet's attitude toward him has been the subject of much discussion and the cause of many misstatements. It is wholly wide of the mark to speak of him as having *attacked* Euripides; the experiments and the innovations of the restless tragedian provided good material for harmless satire, and his excessive pathos and ingenious intellectualism were obvious targets for gibes, but he is never accused of pederasty or of cowardice, of venality or of sycophancy, nor is it ever suggested that any of the other tragic poets of the time is even remotely to be compared with him. If we will assume Aristophanes to be speaking through the mask of Dionysus in the final scene of *The Frogs*, we must also remember that the god has no easy time choosing Aeschylus, and that it is his deepest and most nostalgic emotions that are ultimately decisive.

## THE FROGS

(SCENE:—*In the background are two houses, that of HERACLES and that of PLUTO. Enter DIONYSUS, disguised as HERACLES, with lion-skin and club, but with the high boots of tragedy and a tunic of saffron silk. He is followed by XANTHIAS, seated on a donkey and carrying an immense bale of luggage on a porter's pole. They advance for a while in silence.*)

XANTHIAS (*looking round at his burden with a groan*)

SIR, shall I say one of the regular things  
That people in a theatre always laugh at?

DIONYSUS

Say what you like, except "I'm overloaded."  
But mind, not that. That's simply wormwood to me.

XANTHIAS (*disappointed*)

Not anything funny?

DIONYSUS

Not "Oh, my poor blisters!"

XANTHIAS

Suppose I made the great joke?

DIONYSUS

Why, by all means.

Don't be afraid. Only, for mercy's sake,  
Don't . . .

XANTHIAS

Don't do what?

DIONYSUS

Don't shift your luggage pole  
Across, and say, "I want to blow my nose." <sup>1</sup>

XANTHIAS (*greatly disappointed*)

Nor that I've got such a weight upon my back  
That unless some one helps me quickly I shall sneeze?

DIONYSUS

Oh, please, no. Keep it till I need emetics.

XANTHIAS

Then what's the good of carrying all this lumber  
If I mayn't make one single good old wheeze  
Like Phrynichus, Amipsias, and Lycis?

DIONYSUS

Ah no; don't make them.—When I sit down there  
(*Pointing to the auditorium*)  
And hear some of those choice products, I go home  
A twelvemonth older.

XANTHIAS (*to himself*)

Oh, my poor old neck:  
Blistered all round, and mustn't say it's blistered,  
Because that's funny!

DIONYSUS

Airs and insolence!

When I, Dionysus, child of the Great Jug,  
Must work and walk myself, and have him riding  
Lest he should tire himself or carry things!

XANTHIAS

Am I not carrying things?

DIONYSUS

They're carrying you.

XANTHIAS (*showing the baggage*)

I'm carrying this.

DIONYSUS

How?

XANTHIAS

With my back half broken.

DIONYSUS

That bag is clearly carried by a donkey.

XANTHIAS

No donkey carries bags that *I* am carrying.

DIONYSUS

I suppose you know the donkey's carrying *you*.

XANTHIAS (*turning cross*)

I don't. I only know my shoulder's sore!

DIONYSUS

Well, if it does no good to ride the donkey,  
Go turns, and let the poor beast ride on you.

XANTHIAS (*aside*)

Just like my luck.—Why wasn't I on board  
At Arginusae? " Then I'd let you have it.

DIONYSUS

Dismount, you rascal.—Here's the door close by  
Where I must turn in first—and I on foot! (*Knocking.*)  
Porter! Hi, porter! Hi!

HERACLES (*entering from the house*)

Who's knocking there?

More like a mad bull butting at the door,  
Whoever he is . . . (*seeing DIONYSUS*). God bless us, what's all this?  
(*He examines DIONYSUS minutely, then chokes with silent emotion.*)

DIONYSUS (*aside to XANTHIAS*)

Boy!

XANTHIAS

What, sir?

DIONYSUS

Did you notice?

XANTHIAS

Notice what?

DIONYSUS

The man's afraid.

XANTHIAS

Yes, sir; (*aside*) afraid you're cracked!

HERACLES (*struggling with laughter*)

I wouldn't if I possibly could help it:

I'm trying to bite my lips, but all the same . . . (*Roars with laughter.*)

DIONYSUS

Don't be absurd! Come here. I want something.

HERACLES

I would, but I can't yet shake this laughter off:

The lion-skin on a robe of saffron silk!

How comes my club to sort with high-heeled boots?

What's the idea? Where have you come from now?

DIONYSUS

I've been at sea, serving with Clisthenes.<sup>1</sup>

HERACLES

You fought a battle?

DIONYSUS

Yes: sank several ships,

Some twelve or thirteen.

HERACLES

Just you two?

DIONYSUS

Of course.

XANTHIAS (*aside*)

And then I woke, and it was all a dream!

DIONYSUS

Well, one day I was sitting there on deck

Reading the *Andromeda*, when all at once

A great desire came knocking at my heart,

You'd hardly think . . .

HERACLES

A great desire? How big?

DIONYSUS

Oh, not so big. Perhaps as large as Molon.

HERACLES

Who was the lady?



DIONYSUS

Lady?

HERACLES

Well, the girl?

DIONYSUS

Great Heaven, there wasn't one!

HERACLES

Well, I have always

Considered Clisthenes a perfect lady!

DIONYSUS

Don't mock me, brother! It's a serious thing,  
A passion that has worn me to a shadow.

HERACLES

Well, tell us all about it.

DIONYSUS (*with the despair of an artist explaining himself to a common  
athlete*)

No; I can't.

You never . . . But I'll think of an analogy.  
You never felt a sudden inward craving  
For . . . pease-broth?

HERACLES

Pease-broth? Bless me, crowds of times.

DIONYSUS

See'st then the sudden truth? Or shall I put it  
Another way?

HERACLES

Oh, not about pease-broth.

I see it quite.

DIONYSUS

Well, I am now consumed  
By just that sort of restless craving for  
Euripides.

HERACLES

Lord save us, the man's dead!

DIONYSUS

He is; and no one in this world shall stop me  
From going to see him!

HERACLES

Down to the place of shades?

DIONYSUS

The place of shades or any shadier still.

HERACLES

What do you want to get?

DIONYSUS

I want a poet,  
For most be dead; only the false live on.

HERACLES

Iophon's still alive.

DIONYSUS

Well, there you have it;  
The one good thing still left us, if it is one.  
For even as to that I have my doubts.

HERACLES

But say, why don't you bring up Sophocles  
By preference, if you must have some one back?

DIONYSUS

No, not till I've had Iophon quite alone  
And seen what note he gives without his father.  
Besides, Euripides, being full of tricks,  
Would give the slip to his master, if need were,  
And try to escape with me; while Sophocles,  
Content with us, will be content in Hell.

HERACLES

And Agathon, where is he?

DIONYSUS

Gone far away,  
A poet true, whom many friends regret.

HERACLES

Beshrew him! Where?

DIONYSUS

To feast with peaceful kings!

HERACLES

And Xenocles?

DIONYSUS

Oh, plague take Xenocles!

HERACLES

Pythangelus, then?

(DIONYSUS *shrugs his shoulders in expressive silence.*)XANTHIAS (*to himself*)

And no one thinks of me,

When all my shoulder's skinning, simply skinning.

HERACLES

But aren't there other pretty fellows there

All writing tragedies by tens of thousands,

And miles verboser than Euripides?

DIONYSUS

Leaves without fruit; trills in the empty air,

And starling chatter, mutilating art!

Give them one chance and that's the end of them,

One weak assault on an unprotected Muse.

Search as you will, you'll find no poet now

With grit in him, to wake a word of power.<sup>4</sup>

HERACLES

How "grit"?

DIONYSUS

The grit that gives them heart to risk

Bold things—vast Ether, residence of God,

Or Time's long foot, or souls that won't take oaths

While tongues go swearing falsely by themselves.

HERACLES

You like that stuff?

DIONYSUS

Like it? I rave about it.

HERACLES (*reflecting*)

Why, yes; it's devilish tricky, as you say.

DIONYSUS

"Ride not upon my soul!" Use your own donkey.

HERACLES (*apologising*)

I only meant it was obviously humbug!

DIONYSUS

If ever I need advice about a *dinner*,  
I'll come to you!

XANTHIAS (*to himself*)

And no one thinks of me.

DIONYSUS

But why I came in these especial trappings—  
Disguised as you, in fact—was this. I want you  
To tell me all the hosts with whom you stayed  
That time you went to fetch up Cerberus:  
Tell me your hosts, your harbours, bakers' shops,  
Inns, taverns—reputable and otherwise—  
Springs, roads, towns, posts, and landladies that keep  
The fewest fleas.

XANTHIAS (*as before*)

And no one thinks of me!

HERACLES (*impressively*)

Bold man, and will you dare . . .

DIONYSUS

Now, don't begin

That sort of thing; but tell the two of us  
What road will take us quickest down to Hades—  
And, please, no great extremes of heat or cold!

HERACLES

Well, which one had I better tell you first?—  
Which now?—Ah, yes; suppose you got a boatman  
To tug you, with a hawser—round your neck . . .

DIONYSUS

A chokey sort of journey, that.

HERACLES

Well, then,

There *is* a short road, quick and smooth, the surface  
Well pounded—in a mortar.

DIONYSUS  
The hemlock way?

HERACLES  
Exactly.

DIONYSUS  
Cold and bitter! Why, it freezes  
All your shins numb.

HERACLES  
Do you mind one short and steep?

DIONYSUS  
Not in the least . . . You know I'm no great walker.

HERACLES  
Then just stroll down to Ceramicus . . .

DIONYSUS  
Well?

HERACLES  
Climb up the big tower . . .

DIONYSUS  
Good; and then?

HERACLES  
Then watch  
And see them start the torch-race down below;  
Lean over till you hear the men say "Go,"  
And then, go.

DIONYSUS  
Where?

HERACLES  
Why, over.

DIONYSUS  
Not for me.  
It'd cost me two whole sausage bags of brains.  
I won't go that way.

HERACLES  
Well, how *will* you go?

DIONYSUS

The way *you* went that time.

HERACLES (*impressively*)

The voyage is long.

You first come to a great mere, fathomless  
And very wide.

DIONYSUS (*unimpressed*)

How do I get across?

HERACLES (*with a gesture*)

In a little boat, like that; an aged man  
Will row you across the ferry . . . for two obols.<sup>5</sup>

DIONYSUS

Those two old obols, everywhere at work!  
I wonder how they found their way down there?

HERACLES

Oh, Theseus took them!—After that you'll see  
Snakes and queer monsters, crowds and crowds.

DIONYSUS

Now don't:

Don't play at bogies! You can never move me!

HERACLES

Then deep, deep mire and everlasting filth,  
And, wallowing there, such as have wronged a guest,  
Or picked a wench's pocket while they kissed her,<sup>6</sup>  
Beaten their mothers, smacked their father's jaws,  
Or sworn perjurious oaths before high heaven.

DIONYSUS

And with them, I should hope, such as have learned  
Cinesias's latest Battle Dance,  
Or copied out a speech of Morsimus!

HERACLES

Then you will find a breath about your ears  
Of music, and a light before your eyes  
Most beautiful—like this—and myrtle groves,  
And joyous throngs of women and of men,  
And clapping of glad hands.

DIONYSUS  
And who will *they* be?

HERACLES

The Initiated.<sup>7</sup>

XANTHIAS (*aside*)

Yes; and I'm the donkey  
Holiday-making at the Mysteries!  
But I won't stand this weight one moment longer.  
(*He begins to put down his bundle.*)

HERACLES

And they will forthwith tell you all you seek.  
They have their dwelling just beside the road,  
At Pluto's very door.—So now good-bye;  
And a pleasant journey, brother.

DIONYSUS

Thanks; good-bye

Take care of yourself. (*To XANTHIAS, while HERACLES returns into the house*) Take up the bags again.

XANTHIAS

Before I've put them down?

DIONYSUS

Yes, and be quick.

XANTHIAS

No, really, sir; we ought to hire a porter.

DIONYSUS

And what if I can't find one?

XANTHIAS

Then I'll go.

DIONYSUS

All right.—Why, here's a funeral, just in time.  
(*Enter a FUNERAL on the right.*)

Here, sir—it's you I'm addressing—the defunct;  
Do you care to carry a few traps to Hades?

THE CORPSE (*sitting up*)

How heavy?

DIONYSUS

What you see.

CORPSE

You'll pay two drachmas?

DIONYSUS

Oh, come, that's rather much.

CORPSE

Bearers, move on!

DIONYSUS

My good man, wait! See if we can't arrange.

CORPSE

Two drachmas down, or else don't talk to me.

DIONYSUS

Nine obols?

CORPSE (*lying down again*)

Strike me living if I will!

(*Exit the FUNERAL.*)

XANTHIAS

That dog's too proud! He'll come to a bad end.—

Well, I'll be porter.

DIONYSUS

That's a good brave fellow.

(*They walk across the stage. DIONYSUS peers into the distance.*)

DIONYSUS

What *is* that?

XANTHIAS

That? A lake.

DIONYSUS

By Zeus, it is!

The mere he spoke of.

XANTHIAS

Yes; I see a boat.

DIONYSUS

Yes, by the powers!



XANTHIAS

And yonder must be Charon.

DIONYSUS

Charon, ahoy!

BOTH

Ahoy! Charon, ahoy!

(CHARON enters. *He is an old, grim, and squalid Ferryman, wearing a slave's felt cap and a sleeveless tunic.*)

CHARON

Who is for rest from sufferings and cares?

Who's for the Carrion Crows, and the Dead Donkeys;

Lethé and Sparta and the rest of Hell?

DIONYSUS

I'

CHARON

Get in.

DIONYSUS

Where do you touch? The Carrion Crows,

You said?

CHARON (*gruffly*)

The Dogs will be the place for you.

Get in.

DIONYSUS

Come, Xanthias.

CHARON

I don't take slaves:

Unless he has won his freedom? Did he fight

The battle of the Cold Meat Unpreserved?

XANTHIAS

Well, no; my eyes were very sore just then<sup>8</sup> . . .

CHARON

Then trot round on your legs!

XANTHIAS

Where shall I meet you?

CHARON

At the Cold Seat beside the Blasting Stone.

DIONYSUS (*to XANTHIAS, who hesitates*)

You understand?

XANTHIAS

Oh, quite. (*Aside*) Just like my luck.

What can have crossed me when I started out?

(*Exit XANTHIAS.*)

CHARON

Sit to your oar. (DIONYSUS *does his best to obey*) Any more passengers?  
If so, make haste. (*To* DIONYSUS) What are you doing there?

DIONYSUS

Why, what you told me; sitting on my oar.

CHARON

Oh, are you? Well, get up again and sit

(*Pushing him down*)

Down there—fatty!

DIONYSUS (*doing everything wrong*)

Like that?

CHARON

Put out your arms

And stretch . . .

DIONYSUS

Like that?

CHARON

None of your nonsense here!

Put both your feet against the stretcher.—Now,

In good time, row!

DIONYSUS (*fluently, putting down his oars*)

And how do you expect

A man like me, with no experience,

No seamanship, no Salamis,—to row?

CHARON

You'll row all right; as soon as you fall to,

You'll hear a first-rate tune that *makes* you row.

DIONYSUS

Who sings it?

CHARON

Certain cyncnoranidae.

That's music!

DIONYSUS

Give the word then, and we'll see.

(CHARON *gives the word for rowing and marks the time.* A CHORUS OF FROGS *is heard off stage.*)

FROGS

O brood of the mere and the spring,  
 Gather together and sing  
     From the depths of your throat  
     By the side of the boat,  
 Co-äx, as we move in a ring;

As in Limnae we sang the divine  
 Nyseïan Giver of Wine,  
     When the people in lots  
     With their sanctified Pots  
 Came reeling around my shrine.

Co-äx, co-äx, co-äx,  
 Brekekekex co-äx.

DIONYSUS

Don't sing any more;  
 I begin to be sore!

FROGS

Brekekekex co-äx.

Co-äx, co-äx, co-äx,  
 Brekekekex co-äx!

DIONYSUS

Is it nothing to you  
 If I'm black and I'm blue?

FROGS

Brekekekex co-äx!

## DIONYSUS

A plague on all of your swarming packs.  
There's nothing in you except co-ax!

## FROGS

Well, and what more do you need?  
Though it's none of your business indeed,  
When the Muse thereanent  
Is entirely content,  
And horny-hoof Pan with his reed.

When Apollo is fain to admire  
My voice, on account of his lyre  
Which he frames with the rushes  
And watery bushes—  
Co-ax!—which I grow in the mire.

Co-äx, co-äx, co-äx,  
Brekekekex co-äx!

## DIONYSUS

Peace, musical sisters'  
I'm covered with blisters<sup>9</sup>

## FROGS

Brekekekex co-äx.

Co-äx, co-äx, co-äx,  
Brekekekex co-äx!

Our song we can double  
Without the least trouble.  
Brekekekex co-äx.

Sing we now, if ever hopping  
Through the sedge and flowering rushes;  
In and out the sunshine flopping,  
We have sported, rising, dropping,  
With our song that nothing hushes.

Sing, if e'er in days of storm  
Safe our native oozes bore us,  
Staved the rain off, kept us warm,  
Till we set our dance in form,  
Raised our hubble-bubbling chorus:

Brekekekex co-äx, co-äx!

DIONYSUS

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax!

I can sing it as loud as you.

FROGS

Sisters, that he never must do!

DIONYSUS

Would you have me row till my shoulder cracks?

FROGS

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax!

DIONYSUS

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax!

Groan away till you burst your backs.

It's nothing to me.

FROGS

Just wait till you see.

DIONYSUS

I don't care how you scold.

FROGS

'Then all day long

We will croak you a song

As loud as our throat can hold.

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax'!

DIONYSUS

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax'!

I'll see you don't outdo me in that.

FROGS

Well, *you* shall never beat *us*—that's flat!

DIONYSUS

I'll make you cease your song

If I shout for it all day long,

My lungs I'll tax

With co-ax, co-ax

—I assure you they're thoroughly strong—

Until your efforts at last relax:

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax'!

(*No answer from the FROGS.*)

Brekekekex co-äx, co-äx!!!

I knew in the end I should stop your quacks!

CIIARON

Easy there! Stop her! Lay her alongside.—

Now pay your fare and go.

DIONYSUS (*peering about him*)

There are the obols.

Ho, Xanthias! . . . Where's Xanthias?—Is that you?

XANTHIAS (*from off stage*)

Hullo!

DIONYSUS

Come this way.

XANTHIAS (*entering*)

Oh, I'm glad to see you!

DIONYSUS (*looking round*)

Well, and what have we here?

XANTHIAS

Darkness—and mud.

DIONYSUS

Did you see any of the perjurers here,

And father-beaters, as he said we should?

XANTHIAS

Why, didn't you?

DIONYSUS

I? Lots.

(*Looking full at the audience.*)

I see them now.

Well, what are we to do?

XANTHIAS

Move further on.

This is the place he said was all aswarm

With horrid beasts.

DIONYSUS

A plague on what he said!

Exaggerating just to frighten me,

Because he knew my courage and was jealous.

Naught lives so flown with pride as Heracles!

Why, my best wish would be to meet with something,

Some real adventure, worthy of our travels!

XANTHIAS (*listening*)

Stay!—Yes, upon my word. I hear a noise.

DIONYSUS (*nervously*)

God bless me, where?

XANTHIAS

Behind.

DIONYSUS

Go to the rear.

XANTHIAS

No; it's in front somewhere.

DIONYSUS

Then get in front.

XANTHIAS

Why, there I see it.—Save us!—A great beast. . . .

DIONYSUS (*cowering behind XANTHIAS*)

What like?

XANTHIAS

Horrid! . . . At least it keeps on changing!

It was a bull; now it's a mule; and now

A fair young girl.

DIONYSUS

Where is it? Let me at it!

XANTHIAS

Stay, sir; it's not a girl now, it's a dog.

DIONYSUS

It must be Empusa!

XANTHIAS

Yes. At least its head

Is all on fire.

DIONYSUS

Has it a leg of brass?

XANTHIAS

Yes, that it has. And the other leg of cow-dung.  
It's she!

DIONYSUS

Where shall I go?

XANTHIAS

Well, where shall I?

DIONYSUS (*running forward and addressing the Priest of DIONYSUS in  
his seat of state in the centre of the front row of the audience*)

My Priest, protect me and we'll sup together!

XANTHIAS

We're done for, O Lord Heracles.

DIONYSUS (*cowering again*)

Oh, don't!

Don't shout like that, man, and don't breathe that name.

XANTHIAS

Dionysus, then!

DIONYSUS

No, no. That's worse than the other. . . .

Keep on the way you're going.

XANTHIAS (*after searching about*)

Come along, sir.

DIONYSUS

What is it?

XANTHIAS

Don't be afraid, sir. All goes well.

And we can say as said Hegelochus,

"Beyond these storms I catch a *piece of tail*!"<sup>10</sup>

Empusa's gone.



DIONYSUS

Swear it.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus, she's gone!

DIONYSUS

Again.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus, she's gone!

DIONYSUS

Your solemn oath.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus!!

DIONYSUS (*raising himself*)

Dear me, that made me feel quite pale.

XANTHIAS (*pointing to the Priest*)

And this kind gentleman turned red for sympathy.

DIONYSUS

How can I have sinned to bring all this upon me?

What power above is bent on my destruction?

XANTHIAS

The residence of God, or Time's long foot?

DIONYSUS (*listening as flute-playing is heard outside*)

I say!

XANTHIAS

What is it?

DIONYSUS

Don't you hear it?

XANTHIAS

What?

DIONYSUS

Flutes blowing.

## XANTHIAS

Yes. And such a smell of torches  
Floating towards us, all most Mystery-like!

## DIONYSUS

Crouch quietly down and let us hear the music.  
(*They crouch down at the left. Music is heard far off. XANTHIAS puts down the bundle.*)

CHORUS (*unseen*)

Iacchus, O Iacchus!  
Iacchus, O Iacchus!

## XANTHIAS

That's it, sir. These are the Initiated  
Rejoicing somewhere here, just as he told us.  
Why, it's the old Iacchus hymn that used  
To warm the cockles of Diagoras!

## DIONYSUS

Yes, it must be. However, we'd best sit  
Quite still and listen, till we're sure of it.  
(*There enters gradually the CHORUS, consisting of Men Initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries. They are led by a hierophant or Initiating Priest, and accompanied by a throng of Worshipping Women. They have white robes, wreaths upon their brows, and torches in their hands.*)

CHORUS (*singing, off stage*)

Thou that dwellest in the shadow  
Of great glory here beside us,  
Spirit, Spirit, we have hied us  
To thy dancing in the meadow!  
Come, Iacchus; let thy brow  
Toss its fruited myrtle bough,  
We are thine, O happy dancer; O our comrade, come and guide us!  
Let the mystic measure beat:  
Come in riot fiery fleet;  
Free and holy all before thee,  
While the Charites adore thee,  
And thy Mystae wait the music of thy feet!

## XANTHIAS

O Virgin of Demeter, highly blest,  
What an entrancing smell of roasted pig! <sup>11</sup>

## DIONYSUS

Hush! hold your tongue! Perhaps they'll give you some.

CHORUS (*singing, as they enter*)

Spirit, Spirit, lift the shaken

Splendour of thy tossing torches!

All the meadow flashes, scorches:

Up, Iacchus, and awaken!

Come, thou star that bringest light

To the darkness of our rite,

Till thine old men leap as young men, leap with every thought forsaken

Of the dulness and the fear

Left by many a circling year:

Let thy red light guide the dances

Where thy banded youth advances

To be merry by the blossoms of the mere!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hush, oh hush! for our song begins. Let every one stand aside

Who owns an intellect muddled with sins, or in arts like these untried:

If the mystic rites of the Muses true he has never seen nor sung:

If he never the magical music knew of Cratinus the Bull-eater's tongue:

If he likes in a comedy nothing but riot and meaningless harlequinade:

Or in matters of politics cannot keep quiet and see that cabals be allayed,

But blows up spite and keeps it alight to serve his personal ends:

Or being in power at a critical hour, accepts little gifts from his friends:

Or goes selling a ship, or betraying a fort, or takes to the trade of a smuggler,

Attempting again, in Thorycion's sort,—that pestilent revenue-juggler,—

From Aegina before us to stock Epidaurus with tar and canvas and hide,

Or tries to persuade some friend in the trade for the enemy's ships to provide:

Or a teacher of choirs who forgets his position and damages Hecatë's shrines: <sup>12</sup>

Or the robber of poets, the mere politician, who spites us with pitiful fines <sup>13</sup>

Because we have suitably made him absurd in the God's traditional rhyme:

Behold, I give word: and again give word: and give word for the third, last time:

Make room, all such, for our dance and song.—Up, you, and give us a lay

That is meet for our mirth-making all night long and for this great festival day.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Forth fare all;  
 This mead's bowers  
 Bear fresh flowers;  
 Forth, I call.

Leap, mock, dance, play;  
 Enough and to spare we have feasted to-day!

March: raise high  
 Her whose hands  
 Save these lands;  
 Raise due cry:

Maid, Maid, save these,  
 Tho' it may not exactly Thorycion please!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

One hymn to the Maiden; now raise ye another  
 To the Queen of the Fruits of the Earth  
 To Demeter the Corn-giver, Goddess and Mother,  
 Make worship in musical mirth.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Approach, O Queen of orgies pure,  
 And us, thy faithful band, ensure  
 From morn to eve to ply secure  
 Our mocking and our clowning:  
 To grace thy feast with many a bit  
 Of merry jest or serious wit,  
 And laugh, and earn the prize, and flit  
 Triumphant to the crowning.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*speaking*)

Now call the God of blooming mien; <sup>11</sup>  
 Raise the mystic chorus:  
 Our comrade he and guide unseen,  
 With us and before us.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Iacchus high in glory, thou whose day  
 Of all is merriest, hither, help our play;  
 Show, as we throne thee at thy Maiden's side,  
 How light to thee are our long leagues of way.  
 Iacchus, happy dancer, be our guide.

Thyself, that poorest men thy joy should share,  
 Didst rend thy robe, thy royal sandal tear,  
 That feet unshod might dance, and robes rent wide  
 Wave in thy revel with no after care.  
 Iacchus, happy dancer, be our guide.

Lo there! but now across the dance apace  
 A maiden tripped, a maiden fair of face,  
 Whose tattered smock and kerchief scarce could hide  
 The merry bosom peering from its place.  
 Iacchus, happy dancer, be our guide.

XANTHIAS (*singing*)

I always liked to follow some one else:  
 Suppose we join and dance?

DIONYSUS (*singing*)

Why, so say I.

(*They join the dance*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*singing*)

Perhaps 'twill best beseem us  
 To deal with Archedemus,  
 Who is toothless still and rootless, at seven years from birth:

Yet he leads the public preachers  
 Of those poor dead upper creatures,  
 And is prince of all the shadiness on earth!

And Clisthenes, says rumour,  
 In a wild despairing humour  
 Sits huddled up and tearing out his hair among the graves.

To believe he would incline us  
 That a person named Sebinus  
 Is tossing yet unburied on the waves!

While Caillias, says tattle,  
 Has attended a sea-battle,  
 And lionesses' scalps were the uniform he wore! <sup>15</sup>

DIONYSUS (*singing*)

You'd oblige us much by telling  
 Me the way to Pluto's dwelling.  
 We are strangers newly lighted on your shore.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*singing*)

No need of distant travel  
That problem to unravel;  
For know that while you ask me, you are standing at the door.

DIONYSUS (*singing*)

Then up, my lad, be packing!

XANTHIAS (*singing*)

There's the Devil in the sacking:  
It can't stay still a second on the floor!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*speaking*)

Now onward through Demeter's ring  
Through the leaves and flowers,  
All who love her junketing,  
All who know her powers!  
Fare forward you, while I go here  
With matron and with maiden,  
To make their night-long roaming clear  
With tossing torches laden.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Then on 'mid the meadows deep,  
Where thickest the rosebuds creep  
And the dewdrops are pearliest:  
A jubilant step advance  
In our own, our eternal dance,  
Till its joy the Glad Fates entrance  
Who threaded it earliest.

For ours is the sunshine bright,  
Yea, ours is the joy of light  
All pure, without danger:  
For we thine Elect have been,  
Thy secrets our eyes have seen,  
And our hearts we have guarded clean  
Toward kinsman and stranger!  
(*The CHORUS lines up on one side of the Orchestra.*)

DIONYSUS (*approaching the door of Pluto's house*)

I ought by rights to knock; but how, I wonder.  
I don't know how they do knock in this country.

XANTHIAS

Oh, don't waste time. Go in and do your best,  
Like Heracles in heart as well as garb.

DIONYSUS (*knocking*)

Ho there!

(*The door opens and a Porter appears, whose dress shows him to be  
AEACUS, the Judge of the Dead.*)

AEACUS

Who summons?

DIONYSUS

Heracles the Brave.

AEACUS

Thou rash, impure, and most abandoned man,  
Foul, inly foul, yea foulest upon earth,  
Who harried our dog, Cerberus, choked him dumb,  
Fled, vanished, and left me to bear the blame,  
Who kept him!—Now I have thee on the hip!  
So close the black encaverned rocks of Styx  
And Acheronian crags a-drip with blood  
Surround thee, and Cocytus' circling hounds,  
And the hundred-headed serpent, that shall rend  
Thy bowels asunder; to thy lungs shall cleave  
The lamprey of Tartessus, and thy reins  
And inmost entrails in one paste of gore  
Tithrasian Gorgons gorge for evermore!  
—To whom, even now, I speed my indignant course!  
(*The Porter retires.*)

DIONYSUS (*who has fallen prostrate*)Please! <sup>10</sup>

XANTHIAS

What's the matter? Quick, get up again  
Before they come and see you.

DIONYSUS

But I feel

Faint.—Put a cold wet sponge against my heart.

XANTHIAS (*producing a sponge*)

There; you apply it.

DIONYSUS

Thanks. Where is it?

XANTHIAS

There.

(DIONYSUS *takes and applies it.*)

Ye golden gods, is it there you keep your heart?

DIONYSUS

The nervous shock made it go down and down!

XANTHIAS

You *are* the greatest coward I ever saw,  
Of gods or humans!

DIONYSUS

I a coward?—I had

The presence of mind to ask you for a sponge.  
Few had done more!

XANTHIAS

Could any one do less?

DIONYSUS

A coward would still be flat there, sniffing salts;  
I rose, called for a sponge, and used the sponge.

XANTHIAS

That *was* brave, by Posidon!

DIONYSUS

I should think so.—

And weren't *you* frightened at his awful threats  
And language?

XANTHIAS

I? I never cared a rap.

DIONYSUS

Oh, you're a hero, aren't you?—and want glory.  
Well, you be *me*! Put on this lion's hide  
And take the club—if you're so dauntless-hearted.  
I'll take my turn, and be your luggage-boy.

XANTHIAS

Over with both of them! Of course I will.

(*He proceeds to put on the lion-skin.*)



Now watch if Xanthias-Heracles turns faint,  
Or shows the same "presence of mind," as you.

DIONYSUS

The true Melitean jail-bird, on my life! . . .  
Well, I suppose I'd better take the luggage.  
(*The exchange is just effected when the door again opens  
and there enters a MAID OF PERSEPHONÉ.*)

MAID

Dear Heracles, and is it you once more?  
Come in! No sooner did my mistress learn  
Your coming, than she set her bread to bake,  
Set pots of split-pea porridge, two or three,  
A-boiling, a whole ox upon the coals,  
Cakes in the oven, and big buns.—Oh, come in.

XANTHIAS (*as HERACLES*)

She is very kind; perhaps some other time.

MAID

Oh, really; but I mustn't let you go!  
She's doing everything herself! Braised game,  
Spices and fruits and stoups of the sweetest wine—  
Come in with me.

XANTHIAS

Most kind, but . . .

MAID

No excuses.

I won't let go —A flute-player, very pretty,  
Is waiting for you, and two or three such sweet  
Young dancing girls

XANTHIAS (*wavering*)

Did you say dancing girls?

MAID

Yes. Do come in.—They just were going to serve  
The fish, and have the table lifted in.

XANTHIAS

I will! I'll chance it!—Go straight in and tell  
Those dancing girls that Heracles is coming!  
(*The MAID retires again.*)  
Here, boy, take up the bags and follow me.

DIONYSUS

Stop, please!—You didn't take it seriously  
When I just dressed you as Heracles for fun?  
You can't be so ridiculous, Xanthias.  
Take up the bags at once and bring them in.

XANTHIAS

What? Surely you don't mean to take away  
Your own gift?

DIONYSUS

Mean it? No; I'm doing it!  
Off with that lion-skin, quick.  
(*Begins to strip off the lion-skin by force.*)

XANTHIAS

Help! I'm assaulted . . .  
(*Giving way.*)

I leave it with the Gods!

DIONYSUS (*proceeding to dress himself again*)

The Gods, indeed!

What senseless vanity to expect to be  
Alcmena's son, a mortal and a slave!

XANTHIAS

Well, take it. I don't care.—The time may be,  
God willing, when you'll feel the need of me!

CHORUS (*singing*)

That's the way such points to settle,  
Like a chief of tested mettle,  
Weather-worn on many seas,  
Not in one fixed pattern stopping,  
Like a painted thing, but dropping  
Always towards the side of ease.  
'Tis this instinct for soft places,  
To keep warm while others freeze,  
Marks a man of gifts and graces,  
Like our own Theramenes!

DIONYSUS (*singing*)

Surely 'twould the matter worsen,  
If I saw this low-bred person  
On his cushions sprawling, so,

Served him drinking, watched him winking: <sup>17</sup>—

If he knew what I was thinking—

And he would, for certain, know,

Being a mighty shrewd deviser

Of such fancies—with a blow

P'raps he'd loosen an incisor

From the forefront of my row!

(*During this song there has entered along the street a LANDLADY, who is soon followed by her servant, PLATHANÉ.*)

LANDLADY

Ho, Plathané, here, I want you, Plathané! . . .

Here is that scamp who came to the inn before,

Ate sixteen loaves of bread. . . .

PLATHANÉ

Why, so it is:

The very man!

XANTHIAS (*aside*)

Here's fun for somebody.

LANDLADY

And twenty plates of boiled meat, half an obol

At every gulp!

XANTHIAS (*aside*)

Some one'll catch it now!

LANDLADY

And all that garlic.

DIONYSUS

Nonsense, my good woman,

You don't know what you're saying.

PLATHANÉ

Did you think

I wouldn't know you in those high-heeled boots?

LANDLADY

And all the salt-fish I've not mentioned yet. . . .

PLATHANÉ (*to LANDLADY*)

No, you poor thing; and all the good fresh cheese

The man kept swallowing, and the baskets with it!

LANDLADY (*to XANTHIAS*)

And when he saw me coming for the money  
Glared like a wild bull! Yes, and roared at me!

XANTHIAS

Just what he does! His manners everywhere.

LANDLADY

Tugged at his sword! Pretended to be mad!

PLATHANÉ

Yes, you poor thing; I don't know how you bore it!

LANDLADY

And we got all of a tremble, both of us,  
And ran up the ladder to the loft! And he,  
He tore the matting up—and off he went!

XANTHIAS

Like him, again.

PLATHANÉ

But something must be done!

LANDLADY (*to PLATHANÉ*)

Run, you, and fetch me my protector, Cleon.

PLATHANÉ (*to the LANDLADY, as they run excitedly to go off in different directions*)

And you fetch me Hyperbolus, if you meet him. . . .  
Then we shall crush him!

LANDLADY (*returning*)

Oh, that ugly jaw!

If I could throw a stone, I'd like to break  
Those wicked teeth that ground my larder dry!

PLATHANÉ (*returning on the other side*)

And I should like to fling you in the pit!

LANDLADY (*turning again as she goes off*)

And I should like to get a scythe, and cut  
That throat that swallowed all my sausages.

PLATHANÉ (*the same*)

Well, I'll go straight to Cleon, and this same day  
We'll worm them out in a law-court, come what may!

(*The LANDLADY and PLATHANÉ go off in different directions.*)

DIONYSUS

Plague take me! No friend left me in the world. . . .  
 Except old Xanthias!

XANTHIAS

I know, I know!

We all see what you want. But that's enough!  
 I won't be Heracles.

DIONYSUS

Now don't say that,

Xanthias—old boy!

XANTHIAS

And how am I to be

Alcmena's son—a mortal and a slave?

DIONYSUS

I know you're angry, and quite justly so.  
 Hit me if you like; I won't say one word back.  
 But, mark, if ever again in this wide world  
 I rob you of these clothes, destruction fall  
 On me myself, my wife, my little ones,—  
 And, if you like, on the old bat Archedemus!

XANTHIAS

That oath will do. I take it on those terms.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Now 'tis yours to make repayment  
 For the honour of this raiment,

Wear it well, as erst you wore,  
 If it needs some renovating,  
 Think of whom you're personating,  
 Glare like Heracles and roar.  
 Else, if any fear you show, sir,  
 Any weakness at the core,  
 Any jesting, back you go, sir,  
 To the baggage as before!

XANTHIAS (*singing*)

Thank you for your kind intention,  
 But I had some comprehension  
 Of the task I undertook.  
 Should the lion-skin make for profit,

He'll attempt to make me doff it—  
 That I know—by hook or crook.  
 Still I'll make my acting real,  
 Peppery gait and fiery look.  
 Ha! Here comes the great ordeal:  
 See the door. I'm sure it shook!  
*(The central door opens and the Porter, AEACUS, comes  
 out with two other slaves.)*

AEACUS

Here, seize this dog-stealer and lead him forth  
 To justice, quick.

DIONYSUS (*imitating XANTHIAS*)  
 Here's fun for somebody.

XANTHIAS (*in a Heraclean attitude*)  
 Stop, zounds! Not one step more!

AEACUS

You want to fight?  
 Ho, Ditylas, Scebylas, and Pardocas,  
 Forward! Oblige this person with some fighting!

DIONYSUS (*while the Scythians gradually overpower XANTHIAS*)  
 How shocking to assault the constables—  
 And stealing other people's things!

AEACUS

Unnatural,  
 That's what I call it.

DIONYSUS

Quite a pain to see.

XANTHIAS (*now overpowered and disarmed*)

Now, by Lord Zeus, if ever I've been here  
 Or stol'n from you the value of one hair,  
 You may take and hang me on the nearest tree! . . .  
 Now, listen: and I'll act quite fairly by you;

*(Suddenly indicating DIONYSUS)*

Take this poor boy, and put him to the question! <sup>18</sup>  
 And if you find me guilty, hang me straight.

AEACUS

What tortures do you allow?

XANTHIAS

Use all you like.

Tie him in the ladder, hang him by the feet,  
Whip off his skin with bristle-whips and rack him;  
You might well try some vinegar up his nose,  
And bricks upon his chest, and so on. Only  
No scourges made of . . . leek or young shalott.<sup>19</sup>

AEACUS

A most frank offer, most frank.—If my treatment  
Disables him, the value shall be paid.

XANTHIAS

Don't mention it. Remove him and begin.

AEACUS

Thank you, we'll do it here, that you may witness  
Exactly what he says. (*To DIONYSUS*) Put down your bundle,  
And mind you tell the truth.

DIONYSUS (*who has hitherto been speechless with horror, now bursting out*)

I warn all present,

To torture me is an illegal act,  
Being immortal! And whoever does so  
Must take the consequences.

AEACUS

Why, who *are* you?

DIONYSUS

The immortal Dionysus, son of Zeus;  
And this my slave.

AEACUS (*to XANTHIAS*)

You hear his protest?

XANTHIAS

Yes;

All the more reason, that, for whipping him;  
If he's a real immortal he won't feel it.

DIONYSUS

Well, but you claim to be immortal too;  
They ought to give you just the same as me.

## XANTHIAS

That's fair enough. All right; whichever of us  
 You first find crying, or the least bit minding  
 Your whip, you're free to say he's no true god.

## AEACUS

Sir, you behave like a true gentleman;  
 You come to justice of yourself!—Now then,  
 Strip, both.

## XANTHIAS

How will you test us?

## AEACUS

Easily:

You'll each take whack and whack about.

## XANTHIAS

All right.

AEACUS (*striking XANTHIAS*)

There.

XANTHIAS (*controlling himself with an effort*)

Watch now, if you see me even wince.

## AEACUS

But I've already hit you'

## XANTHIAS

I think not.

## AEACUS

Upon my word, it looks as if I hadn't.

Well, now I'll go and whack the other.

(*Strikes DIONYSUS*)

DIONYSUS (*also controlling himself*)

When?

## AEACUS

I've done it.

DIONYSUS (*with an air of indifference*)

Odd, it didn't make me sneeze!



AEACUS

It is odd!—Well, I'll try the first again.

*(He crosses to XANTHIAS.)*

XANTHIAS

All right. Be quick. *(The blow falls)* Whe-ew

AEACUS

Ah, why "whe-ew"?

It didn't hurt you?

XANTHIAS *(recovering himself)*

No; I just was thinking

When my Diomean Feast would next be due.

AEACUS

A holy thought!—I'll step across again.

*(Strikes DIONYSUS, who howls.)*

DIONYSUS

Ow-ow!

AEACUS

What's that?

DIONYSUS *(recovering himself)*

I saw some cavalry.

AEACUS

What makes your eyes run?

DIONYSUS

There's a smell of onions!

AEACUS

You're sure it didn't hurt you?

DIONYSUS

Hurt? Not it.

AEACUS

I'll step across again then to the first one.

*(Strikes XANTHIAS, who also howls.)*

XANTHIAS

Hi-i!

AEACUS

What is it now?

XANTHIAS

Take out that thorn.

*(Pointing to his foot.)*

AEACUS

What does it mean?—Over we go again.

*(Strikes DIONYSUS.)*

DIONYSUS

O Lord! *(hurriedly turning his wail into a line of poetry)* "of Delos or of Pytho's rock."XANTHIAS *(triumphantly)*

It hurts. You heard?

DIONYSUS

It doesn't! I was saying

A verse of old Hipponax to myself.

XANTHIAS

You're making nothing of it. Hit him hard

Across the soft parts underneath the ribs.

AEACUS *(to XANTHIAS)*

A good idea! Turn over on your back!

*(Strikes him.)*XANTHIAS *(as before)*

O Lord!

DIONYSUS

It hurts!

XANTHIAS *(as though continuing)*

"Posidon ruler free

Of cliffs Aegean and the grey salt sea."

AEACUS

Now, by Demeter, it's beyond my powers  
To tell which one of you's a god!—Come in;  
We'll ask my master. He and Persephassa  
Will easily know you, being gods themselves.

## DIONYSUS

Most wisely said. Indeed I could have wished  
 You'd thought of that before you had me swished.

*(They all go into the house. The CHORUS, left alone on the stage, turns towards the audience.)*

CHORUS (*singing*)

Draw near, O Muse, to the spell of my song,  
 Set foot in the sanctified place,  
 And see thy faithful Athenians throng,  
 To whom the myriad arts belong,  
 The myriad marks of grace,

Greater than Cleophon's own,  
 On whose lips, with bilingual moan,  
     A swallow from Thrace  
     Has taken his place  
 And chirps in blood-curdling tone  
 On the gibberish-tree's thick branches high  
     As he utters a nightingale note,  
     A tumultuous cry  
     That he's certain to die  
 Even with an equal vote!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It behoves this sacred Chorus, in its wisdom and its bliss,  
 To assist the state with counsel. Now our first advice is this:  
 Let Athenians all stand equal; penal laws be swept away.  
 Some of us have been misguided, following Phrynichus astray;  
 Now for all of these, we urge you, let full freedom be decreed  
 To confess the cause that tripped them and blot out that old misdeed.  
 Next, no man should live in Athens outcast, robbed of every right.  
 Shame it is that low-born aliens, just for sharing one sea-fight,  
 Should forthwith become 'Plataeans' and instead of slaves be masters—  
 (Not that in the least I blame you for thus meeting our disasters;  
 No; I pay respectful homage to the one wise thing you've done):  
 But remember these men also, your own kinsmen, sire and son,  
 Who have ofttimes fought beside you, spilt their blood on many seas:  
 Grant for that one fault the pardon which they crave you on their knees.  
 You whom Nature made for wisdom, let your vengeance fall to sleep;  
 Greet as kinsmen and Athenians, burghers true to win and keep,  
 Whosoe'er will brave the storms and fight for Athens at your side!  
 But be sure, if still we spurn them, if we wrap us in our pride,

Stand alone, with Athens tossing in the long arm of the waves,  
Men in days to come shall wonder, and not praise you in your graves.

CHORUS (*singing*)

An' I the make of a man may trow,  
And the ways that lead to a fall,  
Not long will the ape that troubles us now,  
Not long little Cligenes—champion, I vow,  
Of rascally washermen all,

Who hold over soap their sway  
And lye and Cimolian clay  
(Which they thriftily mix  
With the scrapings of bricks)—  
Not long will our little one stay!  
Oh, 'tis well he is warlike and ready to kick  
For if once home from supper he trotted,  
Talking genially thick  
And without his big stick,  
We should probably find him garotted.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It has often struck our notice that the course our city runs  
Is the same towards men and money.—She has true and worthy sons:  
She has good and ancient silver, she has good and recent gold.  
These are coins untouched with alloys; everywhere their fame is told,  
Not all Hellas holds their equal, not all Barbary far and near,  
Gold or silver, each well minted, tested each and ringing clear.  
Yet, we never use them! Others always pass from hand to hand,  
Sorry brass just struck last week and branded with a wretched brand.  
So with men we know for upright, blameless lives and noble names,  
Trained in music and palaestra, freemen's choirs and freemen's games,  
These we spurn for men of brass, for red-haired things of unknown breed,  
Rascal cubs of mongrel fathers—they we use at every need!  
Creatures just arrived in Athens, whom our city, years ago,  
Scarcely would have used as scapegoats<sup>20</sup> to be slaughtered for a show!  
Even now, O race demented, there is time to change your ways;  
Use once more what's worth the using. If we 'scape, the more the praise  
That we fought our fight with wisdom; or, if all is lost for good,  
Let the tree on which they hang us be, at least, of decent wood!  
(*The door opens, and the two slaves, AEACUS and XANTHIAS, return.*)

AEACUS

By Zeus, that's what I call a gentleman!  
That master of yours!

XANTHIAS

Gentleman? That he is!  
There's nothing in his head but wine and wenches!

AEACUS

But not to whip you when you were clean convicted,  
A slave caught masquerading as his master!

XANTHIAS (*significantly*)

I'd like to see him try it!

AEACUS

There you go!  
The old slave trick, that I'm so fond of too.

XANTHIAS

You like it, eh?

AEACUS

Like it? Why, when I get  
Behind my master's back and quietly curse him,  
I feel just like the Blessed in the Mysteries!

XANTHIAS

What about muttering as you go outside  
After a whacking?

AEACUS

Yes, I like that too.

XANTHIAS (*with increasing excitement*)

And prying into people's secrets, eh?

AEACUS (*the same*)

By Zeus, there's nothing like it in the world!

XANTHIAS

Oh! Zeus makes brethren meet!—And what of list'ning  
To what the masters say?

AEACUS

It makes me mad!

XANTHIAS

And telling every word of it to strangers?

AEACUS

Madder than mad, stark staring crimson madder!

XANTHIAS

O Lord Apollo, clap your right hand there,  
Give me your cheek to kiss, and you kiss me!  
(*They embrace; a loud noise is heard inside the house.*)  
But Zeus!—our own Zeus of the Friendly Jailbirds—  
What is that noise . . . those shouts and quarrelling . . .  
Inside?

AEACUS

That? Aeschylus and Euripides!

XANTHIAS

Eh?

AEACUS

Yes; there's a big business just astir,  
And hot dissension among all the dead.

XANTHIAS

About what?

AEACUS

There's a law established here  
Concerning all the large and liberal arts,  
Which grants the foremost master in each art  
Free entertainment at the Central Hearth,  
And also a special throne in Pluto's row . . .

XANTHIAS

Oh, now I understand!

AEACUS

To hold until  
There comes one greater; then he must make way.

XANTHIAS

But how has this affected Aeschylus?

AEACUS

Aeschylus held the throne of tragedy,  
As greatest . . .

XANTHIAS

Held it? Why, who holds it now?

ÆACUS

Well, when Euripides came down, he gave  
Free exhibitions to our choicest thieves,  
Footpads, cut-purses, burglars, father-beaters,  
—Of whom we have numbers here; and when they heard  
The neat retorts, the fencing, and the twists,  
They all went mad and thought him something splendid.  
And he, growing proud, laid hands upon the throne  
Where Aeschylus sat.

XANTHIAS

And wasn't pelted off?

ÆACUS

Not he. The whole folk clamoured for a trial  
To see which most was master of his craft.

XANTHIAS

The whole jail-folk?

ÆACUS

Exactly,—loud as trumpets.

XANTHIAS

And were there none to fight for Aeschylus?

ÆACUS

Goodness is scarce, you know. (*Indicating the audience*) The same as  
here!

XANTHIAS

And what does Pluto mean to do about it?

ÆACUS

Why, hold a trial and contest on the spot  
To test their skill for certain.

XANTHIAS (*reflecting*)

But, I say,

Sophocles surely must have claimed the throne?

## AEACUS

Not he; as soon as ever he came down,  
He kissed old Aeschylus, and wrung his hand,  
And Aeschylus made room on half his scat.  
And now he means to wait—or so, at least,  
Clidemides informs us—in reserve.  
If Aeschylus wins the day, he'll rest content:  
If not, why then, he says, for poor Art's sake,  
He must show fight against Euripides!

## XANTHIAS

It is to be, then?

## AEACUS

Certainly, quite soon.  
Just where you stand we'll have the shock of war.  
They'll weigh the poetry line by line . . .

## XANTHIAS

Poor thing,  
A lamb set in the meat-scale and found wanting!

## AEACUS

They'll bring straight-edges out, and cubit-rules,  
And folded cube-frames . . .

## XANTHIAS

Is it bricks they want?

## AEACUS

And mitre-squares and wedges! Line by line  
Euripides will test all tragedies!

## XANTHIAS

That must make Aeschylus angry, I should think?

## AEACUS

Well, he did stoop and glower like a mad bull.

## XANTHIAS

Who'll be the judge?

## AEACUS

That was a difficulty.  
Both found an utter dearth of proper critics;  
For Aeschylus objected to the Athenians. . . .



## XANTHIAS

Perhaps he thought the jail-folk rather many?

## AEACUS

And all the world beside, he thought mere dirt  
At seeing what kind of thing a poet was.  
So, in the end, they fixed upon your master  
As having much experience in the business.  
But come in; when the master's face looks grave  
There's mostly trouble coming for the slave.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Eftsoons shall dire anger interne be the Thunderer's portion  
When his foe's glib tusk fresh whetted for blood he descries;  
Then fell shall his heart be, and mad; and a pallid distortion  
Descend as a cloud on his eyes.

Yea, words with plumes wild on the wind and with helmets a-glancing,  
With axles a-splinter and marble a-shiver, eftsoons  
Shall bleed, as a man meets the shock of a Thought-builder's prancing  
Stanzas of dusky dragoons.

The deep crest of his mane shall uprise as he slowly unlimbers  
The long-drawn wrath of his brow, and lets loose with a roar  
Epithets welded and screwed, like new torrent-swept timbers  
Blown loose by a giant at war.

Then rises the man of the Mouth; then battleward flashes  
A tester of verses, a smooth and serpentine tongue,  
To dissect each phrase into mincemeat, and argue to ashes  
That high-towered labour of lung!

(*The door opens again. Enter EURIPIDES, DIONYSUS, and AESCHYLUS.*)

## EURIPIDES

Pray, no advice to me! I won't give way,  
I claim that I'm more master of my art.

## DIONYSUS

You hear him, Aeschylus. Why don't you speak?

## EURIPIDES

He wants to open with an awful silence—  
The blood-curdling reserve of his first scenes.

DIONYSUS

My dear sir, I must beg! Control your language!

EURIPIDES

I know him; I've seen through him years ago;  
Bard of the "noble savage," wooden-mouthed,  
No door, no bolt, no bridle to his tongue,  
A torrent of pure bombast—tied in bundles'

AESCHYLUS (*breaking out*)

How say'st thou, Son o' the Goddess of the Greens? <sup>21</sup>—  
You dare speak thus of me, you phrase-collector,  
Blind-beggar-bard and scum of rified rag-bags!  
Oh, you shall rue it!

DIONYSUS

Stop! Stop, Aeschylus;  
Strike not thine heart to fire on rancour old.

AESCHYLUS

No; I'll expose this crutch-and-cripple playwright,  
And what he's worth for all his insolence.

DIONYSUS (*to attendants*)

A lamb, a black lamb, quick, boys! Bring it out  
To sacrifice; a hurricane's let loose! <sup>22</sup>

AESCHYLUS (*to EURIPIDES*)

You and your Cretan dancing-solos! You  
And the ugly amours that you set to verse!

DIONYSUS (*interposing*)

One moment, please, most noble Aeschylus!  
And you, poor wretch, if you have any prudence,  
Get out of the hailstones quick, or else, by Zeus,  
Some word as big as your head will catch you crash  
Behind the ear, and knock out all the . . . Telephus!  
Nay, Aeschylus, pray, pray control your anger;  
Examine and submit to be examined  
With a cool head. Two poets should not meet  
In fishwife style; but here are you, straight off,  
Ablaze and roaring like an oak on fire.

EURIPIDES

For my part I'm quite ready, with no shrinking,  
To bite first or be bitten, as he pleases.

Here are my dialogue, music, and construction;  
 Here's Peleus at your service, Meleager,  
 And Aeolus, and . . . yes, Telephus, by all means!

DIONYSUS

Do you consent to the trial, Aeschylus? Speak.

AESCHYLUS

I well might take objection to the place;  
 It's no fair field for him and me.

DIONYSUS

Why not?

AESCHYLUS

Because my writings haven't died with me,  
 As his have; so he'll have them all to hand. . . .  
 However, I waive the point, if you think fit.

DIONYSUS

Go, some one, bring me frankincense and fire  
 That I may pray for guidance, to decide  
 This contest in the Muses' strictest ways;  
 To whom, meantime, uplift your hymn of praise!

CHORUS (*singing*)

All hail, ye nine heaven-born virginal Muses,  
 Whiche'er of ye watch o'er the manners and uses  
 Of the founts of quotation, when, meeting in fray—  
 All hearts drawn tense for who wins and who loses—  
 With wrestling lithe each the other confuses,  
 Look on the pair that do battle to-day!  
 These be the men to take poems apart  
 By chopping, riving, sawing;  
 Here is the ultimate trial of Art  
 To due completion drawing!

DIONYSUS

Won't you two pray before you show your lines?

AESCHYLUS (*going up to the altar*)

Demeter, thou who feedest all my thought,  
 Grant me but worthiness to worship thee!

DIONYSUS (*to EURIPIDES*)

Won't you put on some frankincense?

EURIPIDES (*staying where he is*)

Oh, thank you;

The gods I pray to are of other metal!

DIONYSUS

Your own stamp, eh? New struck?

EURIPIDES

Exactly so.

DIONYSUS

Well, pray away then to your own peculiar.

EURIPIDES (*esoterically*)

Ether, whereon I batten! Vocal cords!

Reason, and nostrils swift to scent and sneer,

Grant that I duly probe each word I hear.

CHORUS (*singing*)

All of us to hear are yearning

Further from these twins of learning,

What dread road they walk, what burning

Heights they climb of speech and song.

Tongues alert for battle savage,

Tempers keen for war and ravage,

Angered hearts to both belong.

He will fight with passes witty

Smooth and smacking of the city,

Gleaming blades unflecked with rust;

He will seize—to end the matter—

Tree-trunks torn and clubbed, to batter

Brains to bits, and plunge and scatter

Whole arena-fulls of dust!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Now, quick to work. Be sure you both do justice to your cases,

Clear sense, no loose analogies, and no long commonplaces.

EURIPIDES

A little later I will treat my own artistic mettle,

This person's claims I should prefer immediately to settle.

I'll show you how he posed and prosed; with what audacious fooling

He tricked an audience fresh and green from Phrynichus's schooling

Those sole veiled figures on the stage were first among his graces.

Achilles, say, or Niobé, who never showed their faces,

But stood like so much scene-painting, and never a grunt they uttered!

DIONYSUS

Why, no, by Zeus, no more they did!

EURIPIDES

And on the Chorus spluttered  
Through long song-systems, four on end, the actors mute as fishes!

DIONYSUS

I somehow loved that silence, though; and felt it met my wishes  
As no one's talk does nowadays!

EURIPIDES

You hadn't yet seen through it!  
That's all.

DIONYSUS

I really think you're right! But still, what made him do it?

EURIPIDES

The instinct of a charlatan, to keep the audience guessing  
If Niobé ever meant to speak—the play meantime progressing!

DIONYSUS

Of course it was! The sly old dog, to think of how he tricked us!—  
Don't (*to AESCHYLUS*) ramp and fume!

EURIPIDES

We're apt to do so when the facts convict us!  
—Then after this tomfoolery, the heroine, feeling calmer,  
Would utter some twelve wild-bull words, on mid-way in the drama,  
Long ones, with crests and beetling brows, and gorgons round the border,  
That no man ever heard on earth.

AESCHYLUS

The red plague . . . !

DIONYSUS

Order, order!

EURIPIDES

Intelligible—not one line!

DIONYSUS (*to AESCHYLUS*)

Please! Won't your teeth stop gnashing?

## EURIPIDES

All fosses and Scamander-beds, and bloody targes flashing,  
With gryphon-eagles bronze-embossed, and crags, and riders reeling,  
Which somehow never quite joined on.

## DIONYSUS

By Zeus, sir, quite my feeling!

A question comes in Night's long hours, that haunts me like a spectre,  
What kind of fish or fowl you'd call a "russet hippalector."

AESCHYLUS (*breaking in*)

It was a ship's sign, idiot, such as every joiner fixes!

## DIONYSUS

Indeed! I thought perhaps it meant that music-man Eryxis!

## [EURIPIDES

You like then, in a tragic play, a cock? You think it mixes?]

AESCHYLUS (*to EURIPIDES*)

And what did you yourself produce, O fool with pride deluded?

## EURIPIDES

Not "hippalectors," thank the Lord, nor "tragelaphs," as you did—  
The sort of ornament they use to fill a Persian curtain!  
—I had the Drama straight from you, all bloated and uncertain,  
Weighed down with rich and heavy words, puffed out past comprehension.  
I took the case in hand; applied treatment for such distension—  
Beetroot, light phrases, little walks, hot book-juice, and cold reasoning;  
Then fed her up on solos. . . .

DIONYSUS (*aside*)

With Cephisophon for seasoning!

## EURIPIDES

I didn't rave at random, or plunge in and make confusions.  
My first appearing character explained, with due allusions,  
The whole play's pedigree.

DIONYSUS (*aside*)

Your own you left in wise obscurity!

## EURIPIDES

Then no one from the start with me could idle with security.  
They had to work. The men, the slaves, the women, all made speeches,  
The kings, the little girls, the hags . . .

AESCHYLUS

Just see the things he teaches!

And shouldn't you be hanged for that?

EURIPIDES

No, by the lord Apollo!

It's democratic!

DIONYSUS (*to EURIPIDES*)

That's no road for you, my friend, to follow;

You'll find the "little walk" too steep; I recommend you quit it.<sup>23</sup>

EURIPIDES

Next, I taught all the town to talk with freedom.

AESCHYLUS

I admit it.

'Twere better, ere you taught them, you had died amid their curses!

EURIPIDES

I gave them canons to apply and squares for marking verses;

Taught them to see, think, understand, to scheme for what they wanted,

To fall in love, think evil, question all things. . . .

AESCHYLUS

Granted, granted!

EURIPIDES

I put things on the stage that came from daily life and business.

Where men could catch me if I tripped; could listen without dizziness

To things they knew, and judge my art. I never crashed and lightened

And bullied people's senses out; nor tried to keep them frightened

With Magic Swans and Aethiop knights, loud barb and clanging vizor!

Then look at my disciples, too, and mark what creatures his are!

Phormisius is his product and the looby lump Megænetus,

All trumpet, lance, moustache, and glare, who twist their clubs of pine at  
us;

While Clitophon is mine, sirs, and Theramenes the Matchless!

DIONYSUS

Theramenes! Ah, that's the man! All danger leaves him scratchless.

His friends may come to grief, and he be found in awkward fixes,

But always tumbles right end up, not aces—no: all sixes!

EURIPIDES (*more rapidly*)

This was the kind of lore I brought  
To school my town in ways of thought,  
I mingled reasoning with my art  
And shrewdness, till I fired their heart  
To brood, to think things through and through;  
And rule their houses better, too.

DIONYSUS (*still more rapidly*)

Yes, by the powers, that's very true!  
No burgher now, who comes indoors,  
But straight looks round the house and roars:  
"Where is the saucepan gone? And who  
Has bitten that sprat's head away?  
And, out, alas! The earthen pot  
I bought last year is not, is not!  
Where are the leaks of yesterday?  
And who has gnawed this olive, pray?"  
Whereas, before they took his school,  
Each sat at home, a simple, cool,  
Religious, unsuspecting fool,  
And happy in his sheep-like way'

CHORUS (*singing*)

Great Achilles, gaze around thee'  
'Twill astound thee and confound thee.  
Answer now: but keep in bound the  
Words that off the course would tear,  
Bit in teeth, in turmoil flocking.  
Yes: it's monstrous—shameful—shocking—  
Brave old warrior. But beware!

Don't retort with haste or passion;  
Meet the squalls in sailor fashion,  
Mainsail reefed and mast nigh bare;  
Then, when safe beyond disaster  
You may press him fiercer, faster,  
Close and show yourself his master,  
Once the wind is smooth and fair!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O thou who first of the Greeks did build great words to heaven-high towers,  
And the essence of tragedy-padding distilled, give vent to thy pent-up  
showers.



AESCHYLUS

I freely admit that I take it amiss, and I think my anger is just,  
At having to answer a man like this. Still, lest I should seem nonplussed,  
Pray, tell me on what particular ground a poet should claim admiration?

EURIPIDES

If his art is true, and his counsel sound; and if he brings help to the nation,  
By making men better in some respect.

AESCHYLUS

And suppose you have done the reverse,  
And have had upon good strong men the effect of making them weaker  
and worse,  
What, do you say, should your recompense be?

DIONYSUS

The gallows' You needn't ask him.

AESCHYLUS

Well, think what they were when he had them from me! Good six-footers,  
solid of limb,  
Well-born, well-bred, not ready to fly from obeying their country's call,  
Nor in latter-day fashion to loiter and lie, and keep their consciences  
small;  
Their life was in shafts of ash and of elm, in bright plumes fluttering wide,  
In lance and greaves and corslet and helm, and hearts of sevenfold hide!

EURIPIDES (*aside*)

Oh, now he's begun and will probably run a whole armourer's shop on  
my head!

(*To AESCHYLUS*) Stop! How was it due in especial to you, if they were  
so very—well-bred?

DIONYSUS

Come, answer him, Aeschylus! Don't be so hot, or smoulder in silent  
disdain.

AESCHYLUS (*crushingly*)

By a tragedy 'brimming with Ares!'

DIONYSUS

A what?

AESCHYLUS

The "Seven against Thebes."

## DIONYSUS

Pray explain.

## AESCHYLUS

There wasn't a man could see that play but he hungered for havoc and gore.

## DIONYSUS

I'm afraid that tells in the opposite way. For the Thebans profited more, It urged them to fight without flinching or fear, and they did so; and long may you rue it!

## AESCHYLUS

The same thing was open to all of you here, but it didn't amuse you to do it!

Then next I taught you for glory to long, and against all odds stand fast;

That was "The Persians," which bodied in song the noblest deed of the past.

## DIONYSUS

Yes, yes! When Darius arose from the grave it gave me genuine joy,  
And the Chorus stood with its arms a-wave, and observed, "Yow—oy,  
Yow—oy!" <sup>21</sup>

## AESCHYLUS

Yes, that's the effect for a play to produce! For observe, from the world's first start

Those poets have all been of practical use who have been supreme in their art.

First, Orpheus withheld us from bloodshed impure, and vouchsafed us the great revelation;

Musaeus was next, with wisdom to cure diseases and teach divination.

Then Hesiod showed us the season to plough, to sow, and to reap. And the laurels

That shine upon Homer's celestial brow are equally due to his morals!

He taught men to stand, to march, and to arm. . . .

## DIONYSUS

So that was old Homer's profession?

Then I wish he could keep his successors from harm, like Pantacles in the procession,

Who first got his helmet well strapped on his head, and then tried to put in the plume!

## AESCHYLUS

There be many brave men that he fashioned and bred, like Lamachus,  
now in his tomb.

And in his great spirit my plays had a part, with their heroes many and  
brave—

Teucers, Patrocluses, lions at heart; who made my citizens crave

To dash like them at the face of the foe, and leap at the call of a  
trumpet!—

But no Stheneboea I've given you, no; no Phaedra, no heroine-strumpet!  
If I've once put a woman in love in one act of one play, may my teaching  
be scouted!

## EURIPIDES

No, you hadn't exactly the style to attract Aphrodité!

## AESCHYLUS

I'm better without it.

A deal too much of that style she found in some of your friends and you,  
And once, at least, left you flat on the ground!

## DIONYSUS

By Zeus, that's perfectly true.

If he dealt his neighbours such rattling blows, we must think how he suffered  
in person.

## EURIPIDES

And what are the public defects you suppose my poor Stheneboea to  
worsen?

AESCHYLUS (*evading the question with a jest*)

She makes good women, and good men's wives, when their hearts are  
weary and want ease,

Drink jorums of hemlock and finish their lives, to gratify Bellerophontes!

## EURIPIDES

But did I invent the story I told of---Phaedra, say? Wasn't it history?

## AESCHYLUS

It was true, right enough; but the poet should hold such a truth en-  
veloped in mystery,

And not represent it or make it a play. It's his duty to teach, and you know  
it.

As a child learns from all who may come in his way, so the grown world  
learns from the poet.

Oh, words of good counsel should flow from his voice—

## EURIPIDES

And words like Mount Lycabettus  
 Or Parnes, such as you give us for choice, must needs be good counsel?—  
 Oh, let us,  
 Oh, let us at least use the language of men!

## AESCHYLUS

Flat cavil, sir! cavil absurd!  
 When the subject is great and the sentiment, then, of necessity, great  
 grows the word:  
 When heroes give range to their hearts, is it strange if the speech of them  
 over us towers?  
 Nay, the garb of them too must be gorgeous to view, and majestic, and  
 nothing like ours.  
 All this I saw, and established as law, till you came and spoilt it.

## EURIPIDES

How so?

## AESCHYLUS

You wrapped them in rags from old beggarmen's bags, to express their  
 heroical woe,  
 And reduce the spectator to tears of compassion!

## EURIPIDES

Well, what was the harm if I did?

AESCHYLUS (*evading the question as before*)

Bah, your modern rich man has adopted the fashion, for remission of  
 taxes to bid;  
 "He couldn't provide a trireme if he tried;" he implores us his state to  
 behold.

## DIONYSUS

Though rags outside may very well hide good woollens beneath, if it's  
 cold!  
 And when once he's exempted, he gaily departs and pops up at the fish-  
 mongers' stalls.

AESCHYLUS (*continuing*)

Then, next, you have trained in the speechmaking arts nigh every infant  
 that crawls.  
 Oh, this is the thing that such havoc has wrought in the wrestling-school,  
 narrowed the hips  
 Of the poor pale chattering children, and taught the crews of the pick of  
 the ships

To answer back pat to their officer's nose! How unlike my old sailor of yore,  
 With no thought in his head but to guzzle his brose and sing as he bent at the oar!

## DIONYSUS

And spit on the heads of the rowers below,<sup>23</sup> and garott stray lubbers on shore!  
 But our new man just sails where it happens to blow, and argues, and rows no more!

AESCHYLUS (*more rapidly*)

What hasn't he done that is under the sun,  
 And the love-dealing dames that with him have begun?  
     One's her own brother's wife;  
     One says Life is not Life;  
 And one goes into shrines to give birth to a son!  
 Our city through him is filled to the brim  
 With monkeys who chatter to every one's whim;  
     Little scriveners' clerks  
     With their winks and their larks,  
 But for wrestle or race not a muscle in trim!

DIONYSUS (*still more rapidly*)

Not a doubt of it! Why, I laughed fit to cry  
 At the Panathenaea, a man to espy,  
     Pale, flabby, and fat,  
     And bent double at that,  
 Puffing feebly behind, with a tear in his eye:

Till there in their place, with cord and with brace,  
 Were the Potters assembled to quicken his pace;  
     And down they came, whack!  
     On sides, belly, and back,  
 Till he blew out his torch and just fled from the race!<sup>26</sup>

CHORUS (*singing*)

Never were such warriors, never  
 Prize so rich and feud so keen:  
 Dangerous, too, such knots to sever:  
*He* drives on with stern endeavour,  
*He* falls back, but rallies ever,  
 Marks his spot and stabs it clean!

Change your step, though! Do not tarry;  
 Other ways there be to harry  
     Old antagonists in art.  
 Show whatever sparks you carry,  
 Question, answer, thrust and parry—  
 Be they new or ancient, marry,  
     Let them fly, well-winged and smart!

If you fear, from former cases,  
     That the audience p'raps may fail  
 To appreciate your paces,  
 Your allusions and your graces,  
 Look a moment in their faces!  
     They will tell another tale.

Oft from long campaigns returning  
 Thro' the devious roads of learning  
     These have wandered, books in hand:  
 Nature gave them keen discerning  
 Eyes; and you have set them burning!  
 Sharpest thought or deepest yearning—  
     Speak, and these will understand.

EURIPIDES

Quite so; I'll turn then to his prologues straight,  
 And make in that first part of tragedy  
 My first review in detail of this Genius!  
 His exposition always was obscure.

DIONYSUS

Which one will you examine!

EURIPIDES

Which? Oh, lots!

First quote me that from the *Oresteia*, please.

DIONYSUS

Ho, silence in the court! Speak, Aeschylus.

AESCHYLUS (*quoting the first lines of The Choephori*)

"Guide of the Dead, warding a father's way,  
 Be thou my light and saviour, where I pray,  
 In this my fatherland, returned, restored."

DIONYSUS (*to EURIPIDES*)

You find some false lines there?

EURIPIDES

About a dozen!

DIONYSUS

Why, altogether there are only three!

EURIPIDES

But every one has twenty faults in drawing!

(*AESCHYLUS begins to interrupt*)

DIONYSUS

No, stop, stop, Aeschylus; or perhaps you'll find

Your debts run up to more than three iambs.

AESCHYLUS (*raging*)

Stop to let *him* speak?

DIONYSUS

Well, that's my advice.

EURIPIDES

He's gone straight off some thousand miles astray.

AESCHYLUS

Of course it's foolery—but what do *I* care?

Point out the faults.

EURIPIDES

Repeat the lines again.

AESCHYLUS

"Guide of the Dead, warding a father's way, . . ."

EURIPIDES

Orestes speaks those words, I take it, standing

On his dead father's tomb?

AESCHYLUS

I don't deny it.

EURIPIDES

Then what's the father's way that Hermes wards?

Is it the way Orestes' father went,

To darkness by a woman's dark intent?

AESCHYLUS

No, no! He calls on Eriunian Hermes,  
Guide of the Dead, and adds a word to say  
That office is derived from Hermes' father.

EURIPIDES

That's worse than I supposed! For if your Hermes  
Derives his care of dead men from his father, . . .

DIONYSUS (*interrupting*)

Why, resurrectioning's the family trade!

AESCHYLUS

Dionysus, dull of fragrance is thy wine!

DIONYSUS

Well, say the next: and (*to EURIPIDES*) you look out for slips.

AESCHYLUS

"Be thou my light and saviour where I pray  
In this my fatherland returned, restored."

EURIPIDES

Our noble Aeschylus repeats himself.

DIONYSUS

How so?

EURIPIDES

Observe his phrasing, and you'll see.  
First to this land "returned" and then "restored";  
'Returned' is just the same thing as 'restored.'

DIONYSUS

Why, yes! It's just as if you asked your neighbour,  
'Lend me a pail, or, if not that, a bucket.'

AESCHYLUS

Oh, too much talking has bemuzzed your brain!  
The words are not the same; the line is perfect.

DIONYSUS

Now, is it really? Tell me how you mean.

AESCHYLUS

Returning home is the act of any person  
Who has a home; he comes back, nothing more;  
An exile both returns and is restored!



DIONYSUS

True, by Apollo! (*To EURIPIDES*) What do you say to that?

EURIPIDES

I don't admit Orestes was restored.  
He came in secret with no legal permit.

DIONYSUS

By Hermes, yes! (*aside*) I wonder what they mean!

EURIPIDES

Go on then to the next.

(*AESCHYLUS is silent.*)

DIONYSUS

Come, Aeschylus,

Do as he says; (*to EURIPIDES*) and you look out for faults.

AESCHYLUS

"Yea, on this bank of death, I call my lord  
To hear and list. . . ."

EURIPIDES

Another repetition!

"To hear and list"—the same thing palpably!

DIONYSUS

The man was talking to the dead, you dog,  
Who are always called three times—and then don't hear.

AESCHYLUS

Come, how did *you* write prologues?

EURIPIDES

Oh, I'll show you.

And if you find there any repetitions  
Or any irrelevant padding,—spit upon me!

DIONYSUS

Oh, do begin. I mustn't miss those prologues  
In all their exquisite exactitude!

EURIPIDES

"At first was Oedipus in happy state."

AESCHYLUS

He wasn't! He was born and bred in misery.  
Did not Apollo doom him still unborn  
To slay his father? . . .

DIONYSUS (*aside*)  
His poor unborn father?

AESCHYLUS  
"A happy state at first," you call it, do you?

EURIPIDES (*contemptuously resuming*)  
"At first was Oedipus in happy state,  
Then changed he, and became most desolate."

AESCHYLUS  
He didn't. He was never anything else!  
Why, he was scarcely born when they exposed him  
In winter, in a pot, that he might never  
Grow up and be his father's murderer.  
Then off he crawled to Polybus with sore feet,  
Then married an old woman, twice his age,  
Who further chanced to be his mother, then  
Tore out his eyes: the lucky dog he was!

DIONYSUS  
At least he fought no sea-fight with a colleague  
Called Erasinides!

EURIPIDES  
That's no criticism.  
I write my prologues singularly well!

AESCHYLUS  
By Zeus, I won't go pecking word by word  
At every phrase; I'll take one little oil-can,<sup>27</sup>  
God helping me, and send your prologues pop!

EURIPIDES  
My prologues pop . . . with oil-cans?

AESCHYLUS  
Just one oil-can!  
You write them so that nothing comes amiss,  
The bed-quilt, or the oil-can, or the clothes-bag,  
All suit your tragic verse! Wait and I'll prove it.

EURIPIDES

You'll prove it? Really?

AESCHYLUS

Yes.

DIONYSUS

Begin to quote.

EURIPIDES

"Aegyptus, so the tale is spread afar,  
With fifty youths fled in a sea-borne car,  
But, reaching Argos . . ."

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

What's that about the oil-can! Drat the thing!  
Quote him another prologue, and let's see.

EURIPIDES

"Dionysus, who with wand and fawn-skin dight  
On great Parnassus races in the light  
Of lamps far-flashing, . . ."

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

Alas! again the oil-can finds our heart!

EURIPIDES (*beginning to reflect anxiously*)

Oh, it won't come to much, though! Here's another,  
With not a crack to stick the oil-can in!  
"No man hath bliss in full and flawless health;  
Lo, this one hath high race, but little wealth;  
That, base in blood, hath . . ."

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

Euripides!

EURIPIDES

Well?

DIONYSUS

Better furl your sails;  
This oil-can seems inclined to raise the wind!

EURIPIDES

Bah, I disdain to give a thought to it!  
I'll dash it from his hands in half a minute.  
(*He racks his memory*)

DIONYSUS

Well, quote another,—and beware of oil-cans.

EURIPIDES

“Great Cadmus long ago, Agenor’s son,  
From Sidon racing, . . .”

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

Oh, this is awful! Buy the thing outright,  
Before it messes every blessed prologue!

EURIPIDES

I buy him off?

DIONYSUS

I strongly recommend it.

EURIPIDES

No; I have many prologues yet to cite  
Where he can’t find a chink to pour his oil.  
“As rapid wheels to Pisa bore him on,  
Tantalian Pelops . . .”

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

What did I tell you? There it sticks again!  
You might let Pelops have a new one, though—  
You get quite good ones very cheap just now.

EURIPIDES

By Zeus, not yet! I still have plenty left  
“From earth King Oeneus, . . .”

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil can gone!

EURIPIDES

You *must* first let me quote one line entire!

"From earth King Oeneus goodly harvest won,

But, while he worshipped, . . ."

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

During the prayers! Who can have been the thief!

EURIPIDES (*desperately*)

Oh, let him be! I defy him answer this—

"Great Zeus in heaven, the word of truth has flown, . . ."

DIONYSUS

O mercy! *His* is certain to be gone!

They bristle with long oil-cans, hedgehog-wise,

Your prologues; they're as bunged up as your eyes!

For God's sake change the subject.—Take his songs!

EURIPIDES

Songs? Yes, I have materials to show

How bad his are, and always all alike.

CHORUS (*singing*)

What in the world shall we look for next?

Aeschylus' music! I feel perplexed

How he can want it mended.

I have always held that never a man

Had written or sung since the world began

Melodies half so splendid!

(Can he really find a mistake

In the master of inspiration?

I feel some consternation

For our Bacchic prince's sake!)

EURIPIDES

Wonderful songs they are! You'll see directly;

I'll run them all together into one.

DIONYSUS

I'll take some pebbles, then, and count for you.

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

"O Phthian Achilles, canst hark to the battle's man-slaying shock,  
 Yea, shock, and not to succour come?  
 Lo, we of the mere give worship to Hermes, the fount of our stock,  
 Yea, shock, and not to succour come!"

DIONYSUS

Two shocks to you, Aeschylus, there!

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

"Thou choice of Achaea, wide-ruling Atrides, give heed to my  
 schooling!  
 Yea, shock, and not to succour come."

DIONYSUS

A third shock that, I declare!

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

"Ah, peace, and give ear! For the Bee-Maids be near to ope wide  
 Artemis' portals.  
 Yea, shock-a-nock a-succour come!  
 Behold it is mine to sing of the sign of the way fate-laden to mortals;  
 Yah, shocker-knocker succum!" <sup>28</sup>

DIONYSUS

O Zeus Almighty, what a chain of shocks!  
 I think I'll go away and take a bath;  
 The shocks are too much for my nerves and kidneys!

EURIPIDES

Not till you've heard another little set  
 Compounded from his various cithara-songs.

DIONYSUS

Well then, proceed; but don't put any shocks in!

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

"How the might twin-throned of Achaea for Hellene chivalry bringeth  
 Flattothrat toflattothrat!  
 The prince of the powers of storm, the Sphinx thereover he wingeth  
 Flattothrat toflattothrat!  
 With deedful hand and lance the furious fowl of the air  
 Flattothrat toflattothrat!  
 That the wild wind-walking hounds unhindered tear  
 Flattothrat toflattothrat!"

And War toward Ajax leaned his weight,  
Flattothrat toflattothrait!"

DIONYSUS

What's Flattothrat? Was it from Marathon  
You gathered this wool-gatherer's stuff, or where?

AESCHYLUS

Clean was the place I found them, clean the place  
I brought them, loath to glean with Phrynichus  
The same enchanted meadow of the Muse.  
But any place will do for *him* to poach,  
Drink-ditties of Meletus, Carian pipings,  
And wakes, and dancing songs—Here, let me show you!  
Ho, some one bring my lyre! But no; what need  
Of lyres for this stuff? Where's the wench that plays  
The bones?—Approach, Euripidean Muse,  
These songs are meet for your accompaniment!

DIONYSUS

This Muse was once . . . no Lesbian; not at all!

AESCHYLUS (*to EURIPIDES*)

"Ye halcyons by the dancing sea  
Who babble everlastingly,  
While on your bathing pinions fall  
The dewy foam-sprays, fresh and free;  
And, oh, ye spiders deft to crawl  
In many a chink of roof and wall,  
While left and right, before, behind,  
Your fingers wi-i-i-i-ind <sup>29</sup>  
The treasures of the labouring loom,  
Fruit of the shuttle's minstrel mind,  
Where many a songful dolphin trips  
To lead the dark-blue-beaked ships,  
And tosses with aerial touch  
Temples and race-courses and such.  
O bright grape tendril's essence pure,  
Wine to sweep care from human lips;  
Grant me, O child, one arm-pressûre!"  
(*Breaking off.*)

That foot, you see?

DIONYSUS

I do.

AESCHYLUS

And he?

EURIPIDES

Of course I see the foot!

AESCHYLUS

And this is the stuff to trial you bring  
 And face my songs with the kind of thing  
 That a man might sing when he dances a fling  
 To mad Cyrené's flute'

'There, that's your choral stuff! But I've not finished,  
 I want to show the spirit of his solos!

*(Sings again; mysteriously.)*

"What vision of dreaming,  
 Thou fire-hearted Night,  
 Death's minion dark-gleaming,  
 Hast thou sent in thy might?

And his soul was no soul, and the Murk was his mother, a horror to sight!

Black dead was his robe, and his eyes  
 All blood, and the claws of him great;  
 Ye maidens, strike fire and arise;  
 Take pails to the well by the gate,

Yea, bring me a cruse of hot water, to wash off this vision of fate.

Thou Sprite of the Sea,  
 It is e'en as I feared!  
 Fellow-lodgers of me,  
 What dread thing hath appeared?

Lo, Glycé hath stolen my cock, and away from the neighbourhood cleared'  
*(Wildly)*

(Ye Nymphs of the Mountain give aid!  
 And what's come to the scullery-maid?)

*(Tearfully.)*

And I—ah, would I were dead'—  
 To my work had given my mind;  
 A spindle heavy with thread  
 My hands did wi-i-i-ind,

And I meant to go early to market, a suitable buyer to find!



*(Almost weeping.)*

—But he rose, rose, in the air  
 On quivering blades of flight;  
 He left me care, care;  
 And tears, tears of despair,  
 Fell, fell, and dimmed my sight!

*(Recovering himself; in florid, tragic style.)*

Children of Ida's snows,  
 Cretans, take up your bows,  
 And ring the house with many a leaping limb!  
 And thou, fair maid of bliss,  
 Dictynna, Artemis,  
 Range with thy bandogs through each corner dim;  
 Yea, Thou of twofold Fires,  
 Grant me my deep desires,  
 Thou Zeus-born Hecaté; in all men's eyes  
 Let the detective sheen  
 Flashed from thy torches keen,  
 Light me to Glycé's house, and that lost fowl surprise!"

DIONYSUS

Come, stop the singing!

AESCHYLUS

I've had quite enough!  
 What I want is to bring him to the balance;  
 The one sure test of what art is worth!

DIONYSUS

So that's my business next? Come forward, please;  
 I'll weigh out poetry like so much cheese!

*(A large pair of scales is brought forward.)*CHORUS *(singing)*

Oh, the workings of genius are keen and laborious!  
 Here's a new wonder, incredible, glorious!

Who but this twain have the boldness of brain  
 To so quaint an invention to run?  
 Such a marvellous thing, if another had said it had  
 Happened to him, I should never have credited,  
 I should have just thought that he must  
 Simply be talking for fun!

DIONYSUS

Come, take your places by the balance.

AESCHYLUS *and* EURIPIDES  
There!

DIONYSUS

Now, each take hold of it, and speak your verse,  
And don't let go until I say "Cuckoo."

AESCHYLUS *and* EURIPIDES  
(*taking their stand at either side of the balance*)

We have it.

DIONYSUS

Now, each a verse into the scale!

EURIPIDES

"Would God no Argo e'er had winged the brine."

AESCHYLUS

"Sperchius, and ye haunts of grazing kine!"

DIONYSUS

Cuckoo! Let go.—Ah, down comes Aeschylus  
Far lower.

EURIPIDES

Why, what can be the explanation?

DIONYSUS

That river he put in, to wet his wares  
The way wool-dealers do, and make them heavier!  
Besides, you know, the verse you gave had wings!

AESCHYLUS

Well, let him speak another and we'll see.

DIONYSUS

Take hold again then.

AESCHYLUS *and* EURIPIDES  
There you are.

DIONYSUS

Now speak.

EURIPIDES

"Persuasion, save in speech, no temple hath."

AESCHYLUS

"Lo, one god craves no offering, even Death."

DIONYSUS

Let go, let go!

EURIPIDES

Why, his goes down again!

DIONYSUS

He put in Death, a monstrous heavy thing!

EURIPIDES

But my Persuasion made a lovely line!

DIONYSUS

Persuasion has no bulk and not much weight.

Do look about you for some ponderous line

To force the scale down, something large and strong.

EURIPIDES

Where have I such a thing, now? Where?

DIONYSUS (*mischievously*)

I'll tell you:

"Achilles has two aces and a four!"—

Come, speak your lines; this is the final bout.

EURIPIDES

"A mace of weighted iron his right hand sped."

AESCHYLUS

"Chariot on chariot lay, dead piled on dead."

DIONYSUS

He beats you this time too!

EURIPIDES

How does he do it?

DIONYSUS

Two chariots and two corpses in the scale—

Why, ten Egyptians couldn't lift so much!

AESCHYLUS

Come, no more line-for-lines! Let him jump in  
And sit in the scale himself, with all his books,  
His wife, his children, his Cephisophon!  
I'll back two lines of mine against the lot!

*(The central door opens and PLUTO comes forth.)*

PLUTO *(to DIONYSUS)*

Well, is the strife decided?

DIONYSUS

I won't decide! The men are both my friends;  
Why should I make an enemy of either?  
The one's so good, and I so love the other!

PLUTO

In that case you must give up all you came for!

DIONYSUS

And if I do decide?

PLUTO

Why, not to make  
Your trouble fruitless, you may take away  
Whichever you decide for.

DIONYSUS

Hearty thanks'

Now, both, approach, and I'll explain—I came  
Down here to fetch a poet: "Why a poet?"  
That his advice may guide the city true  
And so keep up my worship! Consequently,  
I'll take whichever seems the best adviser.  
Advise me first of Alcibiades,  
Whose birth gives travail still to mother Athens.

PLUTO

What is her disposition towards him?

DIONYSUS

Well,

She loves and hates, and longs still to possess.  
I want the views of both upon that question!

EURIPIDES

Out on the burgher, who to serve his state  
Is slow, but swift to do her deadly hate,  
With much wit for himself, and none for her.

DIONYSUS

Good, by Posidon, that!—And what say you?  
(*To AESCHYLUS.*)

AESCHYLUS

No lion's whelp within thy precincts raise;  
But, if it *be* there, bend thee to its ways!

DIONYSUS

By Zeus the Saviour, still I can't decide!  
The one so fine, and the other so convincing!  
Well, I must ask you both for one more judgment;  
What steps do you advise to save our country?

EURIPIDES

I know and am prepared to say!

DIONYSUS

Say on.

EURIPIDES

Where Mistrust now has sway, put Trust to dwell,  
And where Trust is, Mistrust; and all is well.

DIONYSUS

I don't quite follow. Please say that again,  
Not quite so cleverly and rather plainer.

EURIPIDES

If we count all the men whom now we trust,  
Suspect; and call on those whom now we spurn  
To serve us, we may find deliverance yet

DIONYSUS

And what say you?

AESCHYLUS

First tell me about the city;  
What servants does she choose? The good?

DIONYSUS

Great Heavens,

She loathes them!

AESCHYLUS

And takes pleasure in the vile?

DIONYSUS

Not she, but has perforce to let them serve her!

AESCHYLUS

What hope of comfort is there for a city  
That quarrels with her silk and hates her hodden?

DIONYSUS

That's just what *you* must answer, if you want  
To rise again!

AESCHYLUS

I'll answer there, not here.

DIONYSUS

No; better send up blessing from below.

AESCHYLUS

Her safety is to count her enemy's land  
Her own, yea, and her own her enemy's;  
Her ships her treasures, and her treasure dross!

DIONYSUS

Good;—though it all goes down the juror's throat!

PLUTO

Come, give your judgment!

DIONYSUS

Well, I'll judge like this;  
My choice shall fall on him my soul desires!

EURIPIDES

Remember all the gods by whom you swore  
To take me home with you, and choose your friend!

DIONYSUS

My tongue hath sworn;—but I'll choose Aeschylus!

EURIPIDES

What have you done, you traitor?

DIONYSUS

I? I've judged

That Aeschylus gets the prize. Why shouldn't I?

EURIPIDES

Canst meet mine eyes, fresh from thy deed of shame?

DIONYSUS

What is shame, that the . . . Theatre deems no shame?

EURIPIDES

Hard heart! You mean to leave your old friend dead?

DIONYSUS

Who knoweth if to live is but to die? . . .

If breath is bread and sleep a woolly lie?

PLUTO

Come in, then, both.

DIONYSUS

Again?

PLUTO

To feast with me

Before you sail.

DIONYSUS

With pleasure! That's the way

Duly to crown a well-contented day!

CHORUS (*singing*)

O blessed are they who possess

An extra share of brains!

'Tis a fact that more or less

All fortunes of men express;

As now, by showing

An intellect glowing,

This man his home regains;

Brings benefit far and near

To all who may hold him dear,

And staunches his country's tear,—

All because of his brains!

Then never with Socrates

Make one of the row of fools

Who gabble away at ease,  
 Letting art and music freeze,  
 And freely neglect  
 In every respect  
 The drama's principal rules!  
 Oh, to sit in a gloomy herd  
 A-scraping of word on word,  
 All idle and all absurd,—  
 That is the fate of fools!

PLUTO

Then farewell, Aeschylus! Go your ways,  
 And save your town for happier days  
 By counsel wise; and a school prepare  
 For all the fools—there are plenty there!  
 And take me some parcels, I pray; this sword  
 Is for Cleophon; these pretty ropes for the board  
 Of providers. But ask them one halter to spare  
 For Nicomachus; one, too, is Myrmex's share.

And, along with this venomous

Draught for Archenomus,

Take them my confident prayer,  
 That they all will come here for a visit, and stay.  
 And bid them be quick; for, should they delay,  
 Or meet my request with ingratitude, say

I will fetch them myself, by Apollo!

And hurry the gang of them down with a run  
 All branded and chained—with Leucolophus' son  
 The sublime Adimantus to follow!

AESCHYLUS

I will do as you wish.—And as for my throne,  
 I beg you let Sophocles sit there alone,  
 On guard, till perchance I return some day.  
 For he—all present may mark what I say—

Is my second in art and in wit.

And see, above all, that this devil-may-care  
 Child of deceit with his mountebank air  
 Shall never on that imperial chair

By the wildest of accidents sit!

PLUTO (*to the CHORUS*)

With holy torches in high display  
 Light ye the Marchers' triumphal advance;



Let Aeschylus' music on Aeschylus' way

Echo in song and in dance!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Peace go with him and joy in his journeying! Guide ye our poet  
Forth to the light, ye powers that reign in the Earth and below it;  
Send good thoughts with him, too, for the aid of a travailing nation,  
So shall we rest at the last, and forget our long desolation,  
War and the clashing of wrong.—And for Cleophon, why, if he'd rather,  
Let him fight all alone with his friends, in the far-off fields of his father.

NOTES FOR THE PROGS

1. What the Greek literally says is as follows:

DIONYSUS  
Don't shift your luggage pole  
Across, and say, "I want to take a crap."

XANTHIAS  
Nor that I've got such a weight upon my back  
That unless some one helps me quickly I shall fart?

2. Any slave that had fought in this battle was set free.
3. What the Greek literally says is as follows:

DIONYSUS  
I went aboard Clisthenes.

HERACLES  
Did you fight?

DIONYSUS  
We sank twelve or thirteen enemy ships.

HERACLES  
You two?

DIONYSUS  
Yes, by Apollo!

XANTHIAS (*aside*)  
And then I woke up!

DIONYSUS  
As I was reading the *Andromeda* on the ship, I suddenly felt  
my heart afire with a wish so *very* violent!

HERACLES  
A wish? How big a one?

DIONYSUS

Not so big; about as large as Molon.

HERACLES

For a woman?

DIONYSUS

No.

HERACLES

For a boy, then?

DIONYSUS

Not at all.

HERACLES

For a man, then?

DIONYSUS

Faugh!

HERACLES

Were you making love to Clisthenes?

4. What Dionysus is really saying is that the inferior poets can do no more than piddle; there is none with any seminal fluid in him.

5. The diobolus had for a long time been the standard salary of Athenian public officials, but during the Peloponnesian War the demagogues had effected an increase to three obols.

6. Literally, "or made love to a boy and cheated him out of his pay."

7. One of the chief promises which the Mysteries held out to their devotees was a blissful afterlife.

8. Ophthalmia was a very common complaint in the ancient world, but it would also seem to have been used as an excuse to escape military service.

9. What the Greek literally says is as follows:

DIONYSUS

My hands are full of blisters and my arse is covered with sweat; what with all this bending over it will soon be saying . . .

FROGS

Brekekekex koāx koāx

10. For the details of what actually was said by this actor, see Hegel-ochus in the Glossary.

11. Pigs were sacrificed before the Mysteries.

12. Literally, "Defecates on Hecatē's shrines."

13. The reference is to those who had put through laws designed to reduce the costs and restrict the freedom of comedy.

14. Dionysus.

15. In the Greek Sebinus is called an Anaphlystian, for which see the Glossary, and, a little below, the name of the father of Callias is comically altered from Hipponicus to Hippocinus, "he who makes love to a mare."

16. What the Greek literally says is as follows:

XANTHIAS (*as soon as AEACUS has gone*)

What are you doing?

DIONYSUS (*squatting*)

I have crapped. Invoke the god.

This is sufficient to make the true sense of what follows quite clear. The phrase, "Invoke the god" was the usual utterance at libations.

17. What the Greek really says is: "Would it not be ridiculous if Xanthias, a slave, were stretched out on the Milesian cushions, kissing the dancing girl and asking for a thunder-mug, and I, watching all this, would be playing with my tool, etc."

18. The word of a slave was valid in Athenian courts only if given under torture. Since a man's personal servants would naturally know a great deal about his actions, it was a gesture of confident innocence to give one's slaves up to be examined under torture.

19. Whips of leek or shalott were used in certain religious rites in which ceremonial scourging took place.

20. These scapegoats were individuals whom the community chose to be the bearers of all their sins and then exiled or killed. This exceedingly primitive religious survival is reported to have been practised in various parts of Greece.

21. A parody of a verse, perhaps from the *Telephus*, of Euripides. Originally the word "Sea" stood in place of "Greens." Aristophanes never tires of twitting Euripides with the fact or fancy that his mother had sold vegetables.

22. Such animals were sacrificed to Typhon, the god of storms.

23. Euripides had at various times uttered in his plays highly anti-democratic sentiments. See, e.g., *Orestes* 902-930.

24. This exclamation is not found in *The Persians*, but various ungreeks are, e.g., *oi, oa, ioa*.

25. Literally, "to fart in the face of the rower below and to crap on his mate, etc."

26. Literally, "they beat his belly, sides, flanks, and arse; these blows knocked such a fart out of him that it blew out his torch and he ran away."

27. "An ancient Athenian carried a cruse of olive oil about with him, both to anoint himself with after washing and to eat like butter with his

food. Naturally he was apt to lose it, especially when travelling. In my first edition I could find no object which both ancient Greeks and modern Englishmen would habitually use and lose except an umbrella. But since then motors have come in.

"The point of this famous bit of fooling is, I think, first, that Euripides' tragic style is so little elevated that oil-cans and clothes-bags are quite at home in it; secondly, that there is a certain monotony of grammatical structure in Euripides' prologues, so that you can constantly finish a sentence by a half-line with a verb in it.

"The first point, though burlesquely exaggerated, is true and important. Euripides' style, indeed, is not prosaic. It is strange that competent students of Greek tragic diction should ever have thought it so. But it is wide in its range, and uses colloquial words by the side of very romantic or archaic ones—a dangerous and difficult process, which only a great master of language can successfully carry through. Cf. the 'light weight' of his lines, below, 1365 ff.

"As to the second point, it is amusing to make out the statistics. Of the extant Greek tragedies, the following can have *lekynthion apólese*, 'found his oil-can gone,' stuck on to one of the first ten lines of the prologue: Aesch. *Prom.* 8, *Sept.* 6, *Eum.* 3, and several other lines; Soph. *O. T.* 4, *El.* 5, *Trach.* 3 and 6, *Antig.* 2 and 7; Euripides, *Tro.* 10, *Hec.* 2, *Phoen.* 7, *Hclid.* 2 and 4, *Hecr.* 9, *Hcl.* 4, *El.* 10, *I. A.* 54 (=6), and *I. T.* 2, quoted here. Thus all three tragedians have such passages in the opening of about half their extant plays, and the 'monotony,' if such it be, belongs rather to the style of the tragic prologue than to Euripides."—Gilbert Murray.

28. It should be noted that in the Greek this refrain does not change, but becomes increasingly meaningless in each new context.

29. The singing of more than one note for a single syllable seems to have been very late in making its appearance in Greek music, and this passage testifies to the fact that in Aristophanes' time it must have been regarded as something very new and daring.

X

THE ECCLESIAZUSAE

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

PRAXAGORA

BLEPYRUS, *husband of Praxagora*

WOMEN

A MAN

CHREMES

A CITIZEN

HERALD

A GIRL

A YOUNG MAN

THREE OLD WOMEN

A SERVANT MAID *to* PRAXAGORA

CHORUS OF WOMEN

## INTRODUCTION

BETWEEN *The Frogs* (405) and *The Ecclesiazusae* (392) there is a gap of thirteen years during which we know next to nothing of Aristophanes' literary productions; it is abundantly clear that he did a great deal of writing in these years, but none of it has come down to us, and we are quite unable to form any notion of the nature or the quality of the work that he did at this time. Now it happens that the period 405-392 witnessed a number of events in the history of Athens which were either decisive or significant for her future development. The disaster of Aegospotami was followed in rapid succession by the siege and surrender of the city, the destruction of the walls, the second oligarchical revolution, the reign of terror under the Thirty, and the final triumph of Thrasybulus with the resultant restoration of the democracy and the proclamation of a generous amnesty. A few years later came the trial and the execution of Socrates, and the epoch designated, not without invidious overtones, as the fourth century had evidently begun long before 392. The cultural differences, really qualitative, but often perversely conceived in quantitative terms, between this century and its immediate predecessor inevitably prejudice the reader of the two latest of the plays of Aristophanes, and the mere fact that they were written after 400 condemns them beforehand in the eyes of the excusably partisan or culpably myopic lover of fifth-century Athenian civilization. Even a casual reading of *The Ecclesiazusae* discovers the absence of the parabasis and the reduced importance of the Chorus, but a more intimate acquaintance with the play reveals that within a changed form the poet is still Aristophanes; his best years are behind him, but his dotage, if he ever had any, lies in the far distant future.

There is much in the play that is reminiscent of *Lysistrata*, and if *The Frogs* suggests a successful production of *The Thesmophoriazusae*, *The Ecclesiazusae* may furnish similar, if less cogent, evidence of an earlier victory in 411. In *Lysistrata* we witness the women of Athens effecting a successful revolution to put an end to the war; *The Ecclesiazusae* we find their seizure of power establishing community of property as a



panacea for all the social and economic ills which beset Athens in the first two decades of the fourth century. Thus an Utopian subject and a feminine insurrection permit us to deduce a twofold legacy from both *The Birds* and *Lysistrata*, but the similarities to the latter are more numerous and more specific.

The initial scene is the most remarkable of these, for when the play opens we are presented with the revolutionary leader Praxagora anxiously awaiting the arrival of her fellow conspirators, who have promised to meet her here, in front of her house, at this time. One by one they put in an appearance, and when their number is finally complete, Praxagora instructs and exercises them in the proper and masculine mode of behaviour in the Assembly. As soon as they have satisfied her that they will not betray their sex and thwart her purposes, they don the clothes they have filched from their husbands, attach the false beards they have secretly procured, and Praxagora leads them off to the Assembly, where they hope to seize the helm of state and establish the new order of society.

Immediately after their departure a distressed and ludicrous figure emerges from the house; it is Blepyrus, the husband of Praxagora, whom an urgent need to defecate has driven outdoors wearing his wife's clothes, the only garments which the confused and harassed man has been able to find in the dark. Soon a friend of his, with the prophetic name of Chremes, appears, newly returned from the Assembly, and reports the extraordinary enactments that have just been adopted. The session was unusually well attended, and a great multitude of pale-faced persons, looking like shoemakers, had arrived early and preëmpted the front seats. One of their number, a very beautiful young man, made an eloquent and persuasive speech, in which he proposed that the direction of public affairs be entrusted to the women of the state, and the motion was carried amidst the enthusiastic plaudits of the shoemakers. "It's the one and only innovation that has *not* yet been tried at Athens," remarks Aristophanes, under the mask of Chremes, and we remember that the poet has lived through a lot of history. Blepyrus is delighted with the vision of the luxurious and indolent life he is henceforth to lead, and the two friends part just before Praxagora and the women who form the Chorus return from their legislative adventure. They fortunately have sufficient time to discard their masculine disguises before the reappearance of Blepyrus, who gratuitously informs his wife of the developments in the Assembly. She soon takes the lead in the conversation, and proceeds to explain the operation and to demonstrate the perfection of the new organization of society. The ductile Blepyrus is easily converted, and, entranced by the prospect of being pointed out as the husband of the dictator, he follows his wife to the market-place, where she is to supervise the redistribution of property. We might expect a parabasis at this point, but the manu-

scripts of the play merely indicate that the Chorus performed a dance, and we are forcibly reminded that we are in the Fourth Century.

In the scene which follows, we find a highly witty dialogue between Chremes, who has arranged his property in a travesty of a sacred procession and intends to devote it to the common store, and a nameless citizen who adopts a thoroughly sceptical attitude toward the new order, preferring to wait and see how the others act. The arrival, however, of a female herald to announce a sumptuous feast provided by the state puts a new complexion on things, and the wily citizen, proposing to share the benefits without assuming any of the burdens of the new economy, follows Chremes to the public banquet.

The community of property established by the revolutionaries is to apply not only to material things but also to the relationships between the sexes. The women are not, however, unaware that the economy of free love cannot be allowed to operate on the principle of *laissez-faire*, and have consequently decreed that the old and the unattractive are to have prior rights over the young and the beautiful. The final scene of the comedy exhibits a specimen case of the practical workings of this arrangement. The two houses of the stage-setting are now those of two prostitutes, the one youthful and alluring, the other all too liberally endowed with years and cosmetics. A young man who finds himself strongly attracted to the girl is horrified to discover that he must satisfy the demands of the old woman first, but his arguments and his resistance are entirely fruitless; the law must be obeyed and he resigns himself to the inevitable. Just as he is about to enter the old woman's house he is rescued by the girl, but his joy is not destined to endure, and the unfortunate fellow is almost immediately set upon by a woman far older and much more hideous than the first. His youthful rescuer retires from the unequal contest, but just as the second old woman is taking him home with her, a voice from behind demands where she is going. The young man invokes blessings on his unknown saviour's head, only to discover that it is a third old woman, frightful beyond belief; and he is now dragged off by two harridans, one on each arm. Their contesting claims are left unsettled, and the play ends with an appeal to the judges and the departure of the Chorus for the feast.

The Utopia established by Praxagora bears so remarkable a resemblance to the ideal state described in Plato's *Republic* that the precise nature of the obvious connection between the comedy and the Dialogue has been the subject of much discussion. The chronological difficulty arising from the fact that *The Republic* cannot have been published until about twenty years after *The Ecclesiastusac* leaves us a choice of two explanations, since no one wishes to assume that the philosopher's theories were derived from the dramatist's caricatures. It may be that community

of property had already been suggested as a social and economic panacea, but it seems more reasonable to suppose that the ideas presented in *The Republic* were known for some time before their final publication.

*The Ecclesiazusae* is far from being one of the best of Aristophanes' comedies, and its form is more suggestive of the Middle than of the Old Comedy, but it presents an amusing subject treated with great wit in a play that is very well constructed, and its faults are those of its time rather than of its author. Much of the adverse criticism which has been levelled against it has been motivated by prudery, and a puritanical hostility has sought and unfortunately been able to find a number of minor flaws which give a specious validity to an unreasoning prejudice. When we approach it rationally and candidly we are pleasantly surprised to discover that it is a far better play than we had been led to expect.

## THE ECCLESIAZUSAE

(SCENE:—*The Orchestra represents a public square in Athens; in the background are two houses with an alley between them.*)

PRAXAGORA

*(swinging the lantern, which is to be a signal for the other women;  
in high tragic style)*

OH! THOU shining light of my earthenware lamp, from this high spot shalt thou look abroad. Oh! lamp, I will tell thee thine origin and thy future; 'tis the rapid whirl of the potter's wheel that has lent thee thy shape, and thy wick counterfeits the glory of the sun; mayst thou send the agreed signal flashing afar! In thee alone do we confide, and thou art worthy, for thou art near us when we practise the various postures in which Aphrodité delights upon our couches, and none dreams even in the midst of her sports of seeking to avoid thine eye that watches us. Thou alone shinest into the secret recesses of our thighs and dost singe the hair that groweth there, and with thy flame dost light the actions of our loves. If we open some cellar stored with fruits and wine, thou art our companion, and never dost thou betray or reveal to a neighbour the secrets thou hast learned about us. Therefore thou shalt know likewise the whole of the plot that I have planned with my friends, the women, at the festival of the Scirophoria.

*(She pauses and looks about her )*

I see none of those I was expecting, though dawn approaches; the Assembly is about to gather and we must take our seats in spite of Phylomachus, who forsooth would say, "It is meet the women sit apart and hidden from the eyes of the men." Why, have they not been able then to procure the false beards that they must wear, or to steal their husbands' cloaks? Ah! I see a light approaching; let us draw somewhat aside, for fear it should be a man.

*(She hides in the alley. From the right a woman enters, followed almost immediately by others. All are carrying staffs, men's sandals, and cloaks over their arms.)*

## FIRST WOMAN

Let us start, it is high time; as we left our dwellings, the cock was crowing for the second time.

PRAXAGORA (*to herself*)

And I have spent the whole night waiting for you. (*She emerges from the alley.*) But come, let us call our neighbour by scratching at her door; and gently too, so that her husband may hear nothing.

## SECOND WOMAN

(*coming out of her house; she is dressed like a man, with a staff in her hand*)

I was putting on my shoes, when I heard you scratching, for I was not asleep, so there! Oh! my dear, my husband (he is a Salaminian) never left me an instant's peace, but was at me, for ever at me, all night long, so that it was only just now that I was able to filch his cloak.

## PRAXAGORA

I see Clinareté coming too, along with Sostraté and their next-door neighbour Philaenété. (*To the women that are just arriving; in a loud voice*) Hurry yourselves then, for Glycé has sworn that the last comer shall forfeit three measures of wine and a *choenix* of pease.

## SECOND WOMAN

Don't you see Melisticé, the wife of Smicythion, hurrying hither in her big shoes? I think she is the only one of us all who has had no trouble in getting rid of her husband.

## FIRST WOMAN

And can't you see Geusistraté, the tavern-keeper's wife, with a lamp in her hand?

## PRAXAGORA

And the wives of Philodoretus and Chaeretades, and a great many others; all the useful people in the city, in fact.

## THIRD WOMAN

Oh! my dear, I have had such trouble in getting away! My husband ate such a surfeit of sprats last evening that he was coughing and choking the whole night long.

## PRAXAGORA

Take your seats, and, since you are all gathered here at last, let us see if what we decided on at the feast of the Scirophoria has been duly done.

## FIRST WOMAN

Yes. Firstly, as agreed, I have let the hair under my armpits grow thicker than a bush, furthermore, whilst my husband was at the Assembly, I rubbed myself from head to foot with oil and then stood the whole day long in the sun.

## SECOND WOMAN

So did I. I began by throwing away my razor, so that I might get quite hairy, and no longer resemble a woman.

## PRAXAGORA

Have you the beards that we had all to get ourselves for the Assembly?

## FIRST WOMAN

Yea, by Hecaté! Is this not a fine one?

## SECOND WOMAN

Aye, much finer even than the one Epicrates has.

PRAXAGORA (*to the other women*)

And you?

## FIRST WOMAN

Yes, yes; look, they all nod assent.

## PRAXAGORA

I see that you have got all the rest too, Spartan shoes, staffs and men's cloaks, as it was arranged.

## FIRST WOMAN

I have brought Lamias' club, which I stole from him while he slept.

## PRAXAGORA

What, the club that makes him fart with its weight?

## SECOND WOMAN

By Zeus the Deliverer, if he had the skin of Aegus, he would know better than any other how to shepherd the popular herd.

## PRAXAGORA

But come, let us finish what has yet to be done, while the stars are still shining; the Assembly, at which we mean to be present, will open at dawn.

## FIRST WOMAN

Good; you must take up your place at the foot of the platform and facing the Prytanes.

## SECOND WOMAN

I have brought this with me to card during the Assembly.

(*She shows some wool.*)

## PRAXAGORA

During the Assembly, wretched woman?

## SECOND WOMAN

Surely, by Artemis! shall I hear any less well if I am doing a bit of carding? My little ones are all but naked.

## PRAXAGORA

Think of her wanting to card! whereas we must not let anyone see the smallest part of our bodies.<sup>1</sup> 'Twould be a fine thing if one of us, in the midst of the discussion, rushed on to the speaker's platform and, flinging her cloak aside, showed her Phormisius. If, on the other hand, we are the first to take our seats closely muffled in our cloaks, none will know us. Let us fix these beards on our chins, so that they spread all over our bosoms. How can we fail then to be mistaken for men? Agyrrhius has deceived everyone, thanks to the beard of Pronomus; yet he was no better than a woman, and you see how he now holds the first position in the city. Thus, I adjure you by this day that is about to dawn, let us dare to copy him and let us be clever enough to possess ourselves of the management of affairs. Let us save the ship of state, which just at present none seems able either to sail or row.

FIRST WOMAN (*in a tragic style*)

But where shall we find orators in an Assembly of women?

## PRAXAGORA

Nothing simpler. Is it not said that the cleverest speakers are those who get made love to most often? Well, thanks to the gods, we are that by nature.

## FIRST WOMAN

There's no doubt of that; but the worst of it is our inexperience.

## PRAXAGORA

That's the very reason we are gathered here, in order to prepare the speech we must make in the Assembly. Hasten, therefore, all you who know aught of speaking, to fix on your beards.

## SECOND WOMAN

Oh! you stupid thing! is there ever a one among us cannot use her tongue?

PRAXAGORA

Come, look sharp, on with your beard and become a man. As for me, I will do the same in case I should have a fancy for getting on to the platform. Here are the chaplets.

*(They all put on their beards.)*

SECOND WOMAN

Oh! great gods! my dear Praxagora, do look here! Is it not laughable?

PRAXAGORA

How laughable?

SECOND WOMAN

Our beards look like broiled cuttle-fishes.

PRAXAGORA *(pretending to be the herald)*

Priest, bring in the cat.<sup>2</sup> Step forward, please! Silence, Aripbrates! Go and take your seat. Now, who wishes to speak?

SECOND WOMAN

I do.

PRAXAGORA

Then put on this chaplet and success be with you.

SECOND WOMAN

There!

PRAXAGORA

Well then! begin.

SECOND WOMAN

Before drinking?

PRAXAGORA

Hah! she wants to drink!

SECOND WOMAN

Why, what else is the meaning of this chaplet?

PRAXAGORA

Get you hence! you would probably have played us this trick also before the people.

SECOND WOMAN

Well! don't the men drink then in the Assembly? .



PRAXAGORA

Now she's telling us the men drink!

SECOND WOMAN

Yes, by Artemis, and neat wine too. That's why their decrees breathe of drunkenness and madness. And why libations, why so many ceremonies, if wine plays no part in them? Besides, they abuse each other like drunken men, and you can see the archers dragging more than one uproarious drunkard out of the market-place.

PRAXAGORA

Go back to your seat, you are wandering.

SECOND WOMAN (*returning to her seat*)

Ah! I should have done better not to have muffled myself in this beard; my throat's afire and I feel I shall die of thirst.

PRAXAGORA

Who else wishes to speak?

FIRST WOMAN (*rising*)

I do.

PRAXAGORA

Quick then, take the chaplet; the time's running short. Try to speak worthily, let your language be truly manly, and lean on your staff with dignity.

FIRST WOMAN

I had rather have seen one of your regular orators giving you wise advice; but, as that is not to be, it behoves me to break silence; I cannot, for my part indeed, allow the tavern-keepers to fill up their wine-pits with water. No, by the two goddesses . . .

PRAXAGORA

What? by the two goddesses! <sup>4</sup> Wretched woman, where are your senses?

FIRST WOMAN

Eh! what? . . . I have not asked you for a drink.

PRAXAGORA

No, but you want to pass for a man, and you swear by the two goddesses. Otherwise you did very well.

FIRST WOMAN

Well then. By Apollo . . .

## PRAXAGORA

Stop! All these details of language must be adjusted; else it is quite useless to go to the Assembly.

## FIRST WOMAN

Give me back the chaplet; I wish to speak again, for I think I have got hold of something good. You women who are listening to me . . .

## PRAXAGORA

Women again; why, you wretched creature, it's men that you are addressing.

## FIRST WOMAN

That's the fault of Epigonus, I caught sight of him way over there, and I thought I was speaking to women.

## PRAXAGORA

Come, withdraw and remain seated in the future. I am going to take this chaplet myself and speak in your name. May the gods grant success to my plans!

My country is as dear to me as it is to you, and I groan, I am grieved at all that is happening in it. Scarcely one in ten of those who rule it is honest, and all the others are bad. If you appoint fresh chiefs, they will do still worse. It is hard to correct your peevish humour; you fear those who love you and throw yourselves at the feet of those who betray you. There was a time when we had no assemblies, and then we all thought Agyrrhius a dishonest man; now they are established, he who gets money thinks everything is as it should be, and he who does not, declares all who sell their votes to be worthy of death.

## SECOND WOMAN

By Aphrodité, that is well spoken.

## PRAXAGORA

Why, wretched woman, you have actually called upon Aphrodité. Oh! what a fine thing it would have been if you had said that in the Assembly!

## SECOND WOMAN

But I would not have done it then.

## PRAXAGORA

Well, mind you don't fall into the habit. (*Resuming the oratorical manner*) When we were discussing the alliance,<sup>5</sup> it seemed as though it were all over with Athens if it fell through. No sooner was it made than we were vexed and angry, and the orator who had caused its adoption was compelled to seek safety in flight. Is there talk of equipping a fleet?

The poor man says, yes, but the rich citizen and the countryman say, no. You were angered against the Corinthians and they with you; now they are well disposed towards you, be so towards them. As a rule the Argives are dull, but the Argive Hieronymus is a distinguished chief. Herein lies a spark of hope; but Thrasybulus is far from Athens and you do not recall him.

SECOND WOMAN

Oh! what a brilliant man!

PRAXAGORA (*to her*)

That's better! that's fitting applause. (*Continuing her speech*) Citizens, you are the ones who are the cause of all this trouble. You vote yourselves salaries out of the public funds and care only for your own personal interests; hence the state limps along like Aesimus. But if you hearken to me, you will be saved. I assert that the direction of affairs must be handed over to the women, for they are the ones who have charge and look after our households.

ALL THE WOMEN

Very good, very good, that's perfect! Go on, go on.

PRAXAGORA (*ignoring this interruption*)

They are worth more than you are, as I shall prove. First of all they wash all their wool in warm water, according to the ancient practice; you will never see them changing their method. Ah! if Athens only acted thus, if it did not take delight in ceaseless innovations, would not its happiness be assured? Then the women sit down to cook, just as they always did; they carry things on their head just as they always did; they keep the Thesmophoria, just as they always did; they knead their cakes just as they always did; they make their husbands angry just as they always did; they receive their lovers in their houses just as they always did; they buy dainties just as they always did; they love unmixed wine just as they always did; they delight in being loved just as they always did. Let us therefore hand Athens over to them without endless discussions, without bothering ourselves about what they will do; let us simply hand them over the power, remembering that they are mothers and will therefore spare the blood of our soldiers; besides, who will know better than a mother how to forward provisions to the front? Woman is adept at getting money for herself and will not easily let herself be deceived; she understands deceit too well herself. I omit a thousand other advantages. Take my advice and you will live in perfect happiness.

## FIRST WOMAN

How beautiful this is, my dearest Praxagora, how clever! But where, pray, did you learn all these pretty things?

## PRAXAGORA

When the countryfolk were seeking refuge in the city,<sup>6</sup> I lived on the Pnyx with my husband, and there I learnt to speak through listening to the orators.

## FIRST WOMAN

Then, dear, it's not astonishing that you are so eloquent and clever; henceforward you shall be our leader, so put your great ideas into execution. But if Cephalus belches forth insults against you, what answer will you give him in the Assembly?

## PRAXAGORA

I shall say that he is drivelling

## FIRST WOMAN

But all the world knows that.

## PRAXAGORA

I shall furthermore say that he is a raving madman.

## FIRST WOMAN

There's nobody who does not know that.

## PRAXAGORA

That he, as excellent a statesman as he is, is a clumsy potter.

## FIRST WOMAN

And if the blear-eyed Neoclides comes to insult you?

## PRAXAGORA

To him I shall say, "Go and look at a dog's arse."

## FIRST WOMAN

And if they fly at you?

## PRAXAGORA

Oh! I shall shake them off as best I can; never fear, I know how to use this tool.<sup>7</sup>

## FIRST WOMAN

But there is one thing we don't think of. If the Scythians drag you away, what will you do?

## PRAXAGORA

With my arms akimbo like this, I will never, never let myself be taken round the middle.

## FIRST WOMAN

If they seize you, we will bid them let you go.

## SECOND WOMAN

That's the best way. But how are we going to remember to lift our arms in the Assembly when it's our legs we are used to lifting?

## PRAXAGORA

It's difficult; yet it must be done, and the arm shown naked to the shoulder in order to vote. Quick now, put on these tunics and these Lacedaemonian shoes, as you see the men do each time they go to the Assembly or for a walk. When this is done, fix on your beards, and when they are arranged in the best way possible, dress yourselves in the cloaks you have stolen from your husbands; finally start off, leaning on your staffs and singing some old man's song as the villagers do.

## FIRST WOMAN

Well spoken; and let us hurry to get to the Pnyx before the women from the country, for they will no doubt not fail to come there.

## PRAXAGORA

Quick, quick, for it's the custom that those who are not at the Pnyx early in the morning return home empty-handed.

(PRAXAGORA and the FIRST and SECOND WOMEN depart; those who are left behind form the CHORUS)

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Move forward, citizens, move forward; let us not forget to give ourselves this name and may that of *woman* never slip out of our mouths; woe to us, if it were discovered that we had laid such a plot in the darkness of night.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Let us go to the Assembly then, fellow-citizens; for the Thesmothetes have declared that only those who arrive at daybreak with haggard eye and covered with dust, without having snatched time to eat anything but a snack of garlic-pickle, shall alone receive the triobolus. Walk up smartly, Charitimides, Smicythus and Draces, and do not fail in any point of your part; let us first demand our fee and then vote for all that may perchance be useful for our partisans. . . . Ah! what am I saying? I meant to say, for our fellow-

citizens. Let us drive away these men of the city who used to stay at home and chatter round the table in the days when only an obolus was paid, whereas now one is stifled by the crowds at the Phyx. No! during the archonship of generous Myronides, none would have dared to let himself be paid for the trouble he spent over public business; each one brought his own meal of bread, a couple of onions, three olives and some wine in a little wine-skin. But nowadays we run here to earn the three obols, for the citizen has become as mercenary as the stonemason.

(*THE CHORUS marches away. BLEPYRUS appears in the doorway of his house, wearing PRAXAGORA'S Persian sandals and saffron robe.*)

#### BLEPYRUS

What does this mean? My wife has vanished! it is nearly daybreak and she does not return! I had to take a crap! I woke up and hunted in the darkness for my shoes and my cloak, but grope where I would, I couldn't find them. Meanwhile Mr. O'Shit \* was already knocking on the door and I had only just time to seize my wife's little mantle and her Persian slippers. But where shall I find a place where I *can* take a crap? Bah! One place is as good as another at night-time, no one will see me. Ah! what a damned fool I was to take a wife at my age, and how I could thrash myself for having acted so stupidly! It's certainty she's not gone out for any honest purpose. But the thing to do now is to take a crap.

(*He squats.*)

A MAN (*looking out of the window of the house next door*)

Who's that? Is that not my neighbour Blepyrus? Why, yes, it's no other. Tell me, what's all that yellow about you? Can it be Cinesias who has befouled you so?

#### BLEPYRUS

No, no, I only slipped on my wife's tunic to come out in.

#### MAN

And where is your cloak?

#### BLEPYRUS

I cannot tell you; I hunted for it vainly on the bed.

#### MAN

And why did you not ask your wife for it?

#### BLEPYRUS

Ah! why indeed! because she is not in the house; she has run away, and I greatly fear that she may be doing me an ill turn.

MAN

But, by Posidon, it's the same with myself. My wife has disappeared with my cloak, and what is still worse, with my shoes as well; I cannot find them anywhere.

BLEPYRUS

Nor can I my Laconian ones; but as I urgently needed to crap, I popped my feet into these slippers, so as not to soil my blanket, which is brand new.

MAN

What does it mean? Can some friend have invited her to a feast?

BLEPYRUS

I expect so, for she does not generally misconduct herself, as far as I know.

MAN

What are you doing, making well-ropes? Are you never going to be done? As for myself, I would like to go to the Assembly, and it is time to start, but I've got to find my cloak; I have only one

BLEPYRUS

I am going to have a look too, when I have finished crapping; but I really think there must be a wild pear obstructing my rectum.

MAN

Is it the one which Thrasybulus spoke about to the Lacedaemonians?

BLEPYRUS

Oh! oh! oh! how stopped up I am! Whatever am I to do? It's not merely for the present that I am frightened; but when I have eaten, where is my crap to find an outlet now? This damned McPear<sup>9</sup> fellow has bolted the door. Call a doctor; but who is the cleverest in this branch of the science? Amynon? Perhaps he would not come. Ah! Antisthenes! Let him be brought to me, cost what it will. To judge by his noisy sighs, that man knows what an arse wants, when it needs to crap. Oh! venerated Ilithyia! I shall burst unless the door gives way. Have pity! pity! Let me not become a thunder-mug for the comic poets.

*(Enter CHREMES, returning from the Assembly.)*

CHREMES

Hi! friend, what are you doing there? You're not crapping, are you?

BLEPYRUS *(finding relief at last)*

Oh! there! it is over and I can get up again.

CHREMES

What's this? You have your wife's tunic on.

BLEPYRUS

It was the first thing that came to my hand in the darkness. But where are you coming from?

CHREMES

From the Assembly.

BLEPYRUS

Is it already over then?

CHREMES

Certainly.

BLEPYRUS

Why, it is scarcely daylight.

CHREMES

I did laugh, ye gods, at the vermilion rope-marks that were to be seen all about the Assembly.<sup>10</sup>

BLEPYRUS

Did you get the triobolus?

CHREMES

Would it had so pleased the gods! but I arrived just too late, and am quite ashamed of it; I bring back nothing but this empty wallet.

BLEPYRUS

But why is that?

CHREMES

There was a crowd, such as has never been seen at the Pnyx, and the folk looked pale and wan, like so many shoemakers, so white were they in hue; both I and many another had to go without the triobolus.

BLEPYRUS

Then if I went now, I should get nothing.

CHREMES

No, certainly not, nor even had you gone at the second cock-crow.

BLEPYRUS

Oh! what a misfortune! "Oh, Antilochus! no triobolus! Even death would be better! I am undone!" But what can have attracted such a crowd at that early hour?



## CHREMES

The Prytanes started the discussion of measures closely concerning the safety of the state; immediately, that blear-eyed fellow, the son of Neoclides, was the first to mount the platform. Then the folk shouted with their loudest voice, "What! he dares to speak, and that, too, when the safety of the state is concerned, and he a man who has not known how to save even his own eyebrows!" He, however, shouted louder than all of them, and looking at them asked, "Why, what ought I to have done?"

## BLEPYRUS

Pound together garlic and laserpitium juice, add to this mixture some Laconian spurge, and rub it well into the eyelids at night. That's what I should have answered, had I been there.

## CHREMES

After him that clever rascal Evaeon began to speak; he was naked, so far as we all could see, but he declared he had a cloak; he propounded the most popular, the most democratic, doctrines. "You see," he said, "I have the greatest need of sixteen drachmae, the cost of a new cloak, my health demands it; nevertheless I wish first to care for that of my fellow-citizens and of my country. If the fullers were to supply tunics to the indigent at the approach of winter, none would be exposed to pleurisy. Let him who has neither beds nor coverlets go to sleep at the tanners' after taking a bath; and if they shut the door in winter, let them be condemned to give him three goat-skins."

## BLEPYRUS

By Dionysus, a fine, a very fine notion! Not a soul will vote against his proposal, especially if he adds that the flour-sellers must supply the poor with three measures of corn, or else suffer the severest penalties of the law; this is the only way Nausicydes can be of any use to us.

## CHREMES

Then we saw a handsome young man rush into the tribune, he was all pink and white like young Nicias, and he began to say that the direction of matters should be entrusted to the women; this the crowd of shoemakers began applauding with all their might, while the country-folk assailed him with groans.

## BLEPYRUS

And, indeed, they did well.

## CHREMES

But they were outnumbered, and the orator shouted louder than they, saying much good of the women and much ill of you.

BLEPYRUS (*eagerly*)

And what did he say?

CHREMES

First he said you were a rogue . . .

BLEPYRUS

And you?

CHREMES

Wait a minute! . . . and a thief . . .

BLEPYRUS

I alone?

CHREMES

And an informer.

BLEPYRUS

I alone?

CHREMES

Why, no, by the gods! this whole crowd here.

(*He points to the audience.*)

BLEPYRUS

And who avers the contrary?

CHREMES

He maintained that women were both clever and thrifty, that they never divulged the Mysteries of Demeter, while you and I go about babbling incessantly about whatever happens at the Senate.

BLEPYRUS

By Hermes, he was not lying!

CHREMES

Then he added that the women lend each other clothes, trinkets of gold and silver, drinking-cups, and not before witnesses too, but all by themselves, and that they return everything with exactitude without ever cheating each other; whereas, according to him, *we* are ever ready to deny the loans we have effected

BLEPYRUS

Yes, by Posidon, and in spite of witnesses.

## CHREMES

Again, he said that women were not informers, nor did they bring law-suits, nor hatch conspiracies; in short, he praised the women in every possible manner.

## BLEPYRUS

And what was decided?

## CHREMES

To confide the direction of affairs to them; it's the one and only innovation that has *not* yet been tried at Athens.

## BLEPYRUS

And it was voted?

## CHREMES

Yes.

## BLEPYRUS

And everything that used to be the men's concern has been given over to the women?

## CHREMES

You express it exactly.

## BLEPYRUS

Thus it will be my wife who will go to the courts now in my stead?

## CHREMES

And it will be she who will keep your children in your place.

## BLEPYRUS

I shall no longer have to tire myself out with work from daybreak onwards?

## CHREMES

No, 'twill be the women's business, and you can stay at home and amuse yourself with farting the whole day through.

## BLEPYRUS

Well, what I fear for us fellows now is, that, holding the reins of government, they will forcibly compel us . . .

## CHREMES

To do what?

## BLEPYRUS

. . . to lay them.

CHREMES

And if we are not able?

BLEPYRUS

They will give us no dinner.

CHREMES

Well then, do your duty; dinner and love-making form a double enjoyment.

BLEPYRUS

Ah! but I hate compulsion.

CHREMES

But if it is for the public good, let us resign ourselves. It's an old saying that our absurdest and maddest decrees always somehow turn out for our good. May it be so in this case, oh gods, oh venerable Pallas! But I must be off; so, good-bye to you!  
(Exit.)

BLEPYRUS

Good-bye, Chremes.

(He goes back into his house.)

CHORUS (*returning from the Assembly, still dressed like men; singing*)

March along, go forward. Is there some man following us? Turn round, examine everywhere and keep a good look-out; be on your guard against every trick, for they might spy on us from behind. Let us make as much noise as possible as we tramp. It would be a disgrace for all of us if we allowed ourselves to be caught in this deed by the men. Come, wrap yourselves up well, and search both right and left, so that no mischance may happen to us. Let us hasten our steps; here we are close to the meeting-place whence we started for the Assembly, and here is the house of our leader, the author of this bold scheme, which is now decreed by all the citizens. Let us not lose a moment in taking off our false beards, for we might be recognized and denounced. Let us stand under the shadow of this wall; let us glance round sharply with our eye to beware of surprises, while we quickly resume our ordinary dress. Ah! here is our leader, returning from the Assembly. Hasten to relieve your chins of these flowing manes. Look at your comrades yonder; they have already made themselves women again some while ago.

(They remove the beards as PRAXAGORA and the other women enter from the right through the Orchestra.)

## PRAXAGORA

Friends, success has crowned our plans. But off with these cloaks and these boots quick, before any man sees you; unbuckle the Laconian straps and get rid of your staffs; (*to the LEADER*) and you help them with their toilet. As for myself, I am going to slip quietly into the house and replace my husband's cloak and other gear where I took them from, before he can suspect anything.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There! it's done according to your bidding. Now tell us how we can be of service to you, so that we may show you our obedience, for we have never seen a cleverer woman than you.

## PRAXAGORA

Wait! I only wish to use the power given me in accordance with your wishes, for, in the market-place, in the midst of the shouts and danger, I appreciated your indomitable courage.

(*Just as she is about to enter the house BLEPYRUS appears in the doorway.*)

## BLEPYRUS

Eh, Praxagora! where are you coming from?

## PRAXAGORA

How does that concern you, dear?

## BLEPYRUS

Why, greatly! what a silly question!

## PRAXAGORA

You don't think I have come from a lover's?

## BLEPYRUS

No, perhaps not from only one.

## PRAXAGORA

You can make yourself sure of that.

## BLEPYRUS

And how?

## PRAXAGORA

You can see whether my hair smells of perfume.

## BLEPYRUS

What? cannot a woman possibly be laid without perfume, eh!

PRAXAGORA

The gods forbend, as far as I am concerned.

BLEPYRUS

Why did you go off at early dawn with my cloak?

PRAXAGORA

A companion, a friend who was in labour, had sent to fetch me.

BLEPYRUS

Could you not have told me?

PRAXAGORA

Oh, my dear, would you have me caring nothing for a poor woman in that plight?

BLEPYRUS

A word would have been enough. There's something behind all this.

PRAXAGORA

No, I call the goddesses to witness! I went running off; the poor woman who summoned me begged me to come, whatever might betide.

BLEPYRUS

And why did you not take *your* mantle? Instead of that, you carry off mine, you throw your dress upon the bed and you leave me as the dead are left, bar the chaplets and perfumes.

PRAXAGORA

It was cold, and I am frail and delicate; I took your cloak for greater warmth, leaving you thoroughly warm yourself beneath your coverlets.

BLEPYRUS

And my shoes and staff, those too went off with you?

PRAXAGORA

I was afraid they might rob me of the cloak, and so, to look like a man, I put on your shoes and walked with a heavy tread and struck the stones with your staff.

BLEPYRUS

D'you know you have made us lose a *sextary* of wheat, which I should have bought with the triobolus of the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA

Be comforted, for she had a boy.

BLEPYRUS

Who? the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA

No, no, the woman I helped. But has the Assembly taken place then?

BLEPYRUS

Did I not tell you of it yesterday?

PRAXAGORA

True; I remember now.

BLEPYRUS

And don't you know the decrees that have been voted?

PRAXAGORA

No indeed.

BLEPYRUS

Go to! you can live on lobster from now on, for they say the government is handed over to you.

PRAXAGORA

To do what—to spin?

BLEPYRUS

No, that you may rule . . .

PRAXAGORA

What?

BLEPYRUS

. . . over all public business.

PRAXAGORA (*as she exclaims this CHIREMES reappears*)  
Oh! by Aphrodité! how happy Athens will be!

BLEPYRUS

Why so?

PRAXAGORA

For a thousand reasons. None will dare now to do shameless deeds, to give false testimony or lay informations.

BLEPYRUS

Stop! in the name of the gods! Do you want me to die of hunger?

## CHREMES

Good sir, let your wife speak.

## PRAXAGORA

There will be no more thieves, nor envious people, no more rags nor misery, no more abuse and no more prosecutions and law-suits.

## CHREMES

By Posidon! that's grand, if it's true!

## PRAXAGORA

I shall prove it and you shall be my witness and even he (*pointing to Blepyrus*) will have no objections to raise.

CHORUS (*singing*)

You have served your friends, but now it behoves you to apply your ability and your care to the welfare of the people. Devote the fecundity of your mind to the public weal; adorn the citizens' lives with a thousand enjoyments and teach them to seize every favourable opportunity. Devise some ingenious method to secure the much-needed salvation of Athens; but let neither your acts nor your words recall anything of the past, for 'tis only innovations that please.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But do not fail to put your plans into execution immediately; it's quick action that pleases the audience.

## PRAXAGORA

I believe my ideas are good, but what I fear is that the public will cling to the old customs and refuse to accept my reforms.

## CHREMES

Have no fear about that. Love of novelty and disdain for traditions, these are the dominating principles among us.

PRAXAGORA (*to the audience*)

Let none contradict nor interrupt me until I have explained my plan. I want all to have a share of everything and all property to be in common; there will no longer be either rich or poor; no longer shall we see one man harvesting vast tracts of land, while another has not ground enough to be buried in, nor one man surround himself with a whole army of slaves, while another has not a single attendant; I intend that there shall only be one and the same condition of life for all.

## BLEPYRUS

But how do you mean for all?



PRAXAGORA (*impatiently*)

You'll eat dung before I do! <sup>11</sup>

BLEPYRUS

Won't the dung be common too?

PRAXAGORA

No, no, but you interrupted me too soon. This is what I was going to say: I shall begin by making land, money, everything that is private property, common to all. Then we shall live on this common wealth, which we shall take care to administer with wise thrift

BLEPYRUS

And how about the man who has no land, but only gold and silver coins, that cannot be seen?

PRAXAGORA

He must bring them to the common stock, and if he fails he will be a perjured man.

BLEPYRUS

That won't worry him much, for has he not gained them by perjury?

PRAXAGORA

But his riches will no longer be of any use to him.

BLEPYRUS

Why?

PRAXAGORA

The poor will no longer be obliged to work; each will have all that he needs, bread, salt fish, cakes, tunics, wine, chaplets and chick-pease; of what advantage will it be to him not to contribute his share to the common wealth? What do you think of it?

BLEPYRUS

But is it not the biggest robbers that have all these things?

CHREMES

Yes, formerly, under the old order of things; but now that all goods are in common, what will he gain by not bringing his wealth into the general stock?

BLEPYRUS

If someone saw a pretty wench and wished to lay her, he would take some of his reserve store to make her a present and stay the night with her; this would not prevent him claiming his share of the common property.

PRAXAGORA

But he can sleep with her for nothing; I intend that women shall belong to all men in common, and each shall beget children by any man that wishes to have her.

BLEPYRUS

But all will go to the prettiest woman and try to lay her.

PRAXAGORA

The ugliest and the most flat-nosed will be side by side with the most charming, and to win the latter's favours, a man will first have to get into the former.

BLEPYRUS

But what about us oldsters? If we have to lay the old women first, how can we keep our tools from failing before we get into the Promised Land?

PRAXAGORA

They will make no resistance. Never fear; they will make no resistance.

BLEPYRUS

Resistance to what?

PRAXAGORA

To the pleasure of the thing. This is the way that matters will be ordered for you.

BLEPYRUS

It's very well conceived for you women, for every wench's hole will be filled; but what about the men? The women will run away from the ugly ones and chase the good-looking.

PRAXAGORA

The ugly will follow the handsomest into the public places after supper and see to it that the law, which forbids the women to sleep with the big, handsome men before having satisfied the ugly shrimps, is complied with.

BLEPYRUS

Thus ugly Lysicrates' nose will be as proud as the handsomest face?

PRAXAGORA

Yes, by Apollo! this is a truly popular decree, and what a set-back it will be for one of those elegants with their fingers loaded with rings, when a man with heavy shoes says to him, "Give way to me and wait till I have done; you will pass in after me."

BLEPYRUS

But if we live in this fashion, how will each one know his children?

PRAXAGORA

The youngest will look upon the oldest as their fathers.

BLEPYRUS

Ah! how heartily they will strangle all the old men, since even now, when each one knows his father, they make no bones about strangling him! then, my word! won't they just scorn and crap upon the old folks!

PRAXAGORA

But those around will prevent it. Hitherto, when anyone saw an old man beaten, he would not meddle, because it did not concern him; but now each will fear the sufferer may be his own father and such violence will be stopped.

BLEPYRUS

What you say is not so silly after all; but it would be highly unpleasant were Epicurus and Leucolophas to come up and call me father.

CHREMES

But it would be far worse, were . . .

BLEPYRUS

Were what?

CHREMES

. . . Aristyllus to embrace you and style you his father.

BLEPYRUS

He'll regret it if he does!

CHREMES

For you would smell vilely of mint if he kissed you. But he was born before the decree was carried, so that you have not to fear his kiss.

BLEPYRUS

It would be awful. But who will till the soil?

PRAXAGORA

The slaves. Your only cares will be to scent yourself, and to go and dine, when the shadow of the gnomon is ten feet long on the dial.

BLEPYRUS

But how shall we obtain clothing? Tell me that!

## PRAXAGORA

You will first wear out those you have, and then we women will weave you others.

## BLEPYRUS

Now another point: if the magistrates condemn a citizen to the payment of a fine, how is he going to do it? Out of the public funds? That would not be right surely.

## PRAXAGORA

But there will be no more lawsuits.

## BLEPYRUS

This rule will ruin you.

## CHREMES

I think so too.

## PRAXAGORA

Besides, my dear, why should there be lawsuits?

## BLEPYRUS

Oh! for a thousand reasons, on my faith! Firstly, because a debtor denies his obligation.

## PRAXAGORA

But where will the lender get the money to lend, if all is in common? unless he steals it out of the treasury? and he could not hide that!

## CHREMES

Well thought out, by Demeter!

## BLEPYRUS

But tell me this: here are some men who are returning from a feast and are drunk and they strike some passer-by; how are they going to pay the fine? Ah! you are puzzled now!

## PRAXAGORA

They will have to take it out of their pittance; and being thus punished through their belly, they will not care to begin again.

## BLEPYRUS

There will be no more thieves then, eh?

## PRAXAGORA

Why steal, if you have a share of everything?

BLEPYRUS

People will not be robbed any more at night?

CHREMES

Not if you sleep at home.

PRAXAGORA

Even if you sleep outdoors there will be no more danger, for all will have the means of living. Besides, if anyone wanted to steal your cloak, you would give it to him yourself. Why not? You will only have to go to the common store and be given a better one.

BLEPYRUS

There will be no more playing at dice?

PRAXAGORA

What object will there be in playing?

BLEPYRUS

But what kind of life is it you propose to set up?

PRAXAGORA

The life in common. Athens will become nothing more than a single house, in which everything will belong to everyone; so that everybody will be able to go from one house to the other at pleasure.

BLEPYRUS

And where will the meals be served?

PRAXAGORA

The law-courts and the porticoes will be turned into dining-halls.

BLEPYRUS

And what will the speaker's platform be used for?

PRAXAGORA

I shall place the bowls and the ewers there; and young children will sing the glory of the brave from there, also the infamy of cowards, who out of very shame will no longer dare to come to the public meals.

BLEPYRUS

Well thought out, by Apollo! And what will you do with the urns?

PRAXAGORA

I shall have them taken to the market-place, and standing close to the statue of Harmodius, I shall draw a lot for each citizen, which by its letter will show the place where he must go to dine. Thus, those for whom I have

drawn an R will go to the royal portico; if it's a T, they will go to the portico of Theseus; if it's an F, to that of the flour-market.

BLEPYRUS

To cram himself there like a capon? <sup>12</sup>

PRAXAGORA

No, to dine there.

BLEPYRUS

And the citizen whom the lot has not given a letter showing where he is to dine will be driven off by everyone?

PRAXAGORA (*with great solemnity*)

But that will not occur. Each man will have plenty; he will not leave the feast until he is well drunk, and then with a chaplet on his head and a torch in his hand; and then the women running to meet you in the cross-roads will say, "This way, come to our house, you will find a beautiful young girl there."—"And I," another will call from her balcony, "have one so pretty and as white as milk; but before touching her, you must sleep with me." And the ugly men, watching closely after the handsome fellows, will say, "Hi! friend, where are you running to? Go in, but you must do nothing; it's the ugly and the flat-nosed to whom the law gives the right to make love first; amuse yourself on the porch while you wait, in handling your fig-leaves and playing with yourself." Well, tell me, does that picture suit you?

BLEPYRUS AND CHIREMES

Marvellously well

PRAXAGORA

I must now go to the market-place to receive the property that is going to be placed in common and to choose a woman with a loud voice as my herald. I have all the cares of state on my shoulders, since the power has been entrusted to me. I must likewise go to busy myself about establishing the common meals, and you will attend your first banquet to-day.

BLEPYRUS

Are we going to banquet?

PRAXAGORA

Why, undoubtedly! Furthermore, I propose abolishing the whores.

BLEPYRUS

And what for?

## PRAXAGORA

It's clear enough why; so that, instead of them, *we* may have the first-fruits of the young men. It is not meet that tricked-out slaves should rob free-born women of their pleasures. Let the courtesans be free to sleep with the slaves.

## BLEPYRUS

I will march at your side, so that I may be seen and that everyone may say, "Look at the Dictator's husband!"

*(He follows PRAXAGORA into their house.)*

## CHREMES

As for me, I shall arrange my belongings and take inventory of them, in order that I may take them to the market-place.

*(He departs.)*

*(There is an interlude of dancing by the CHORUS, after which CHREMES returns with his belongings and arranges them in a long line.)*

## CHREMES

Come hither, my beautiful sieve, I have nothing more precious than you, come, all clotted with the flour of which I have poured so many sacks through you; you shall act the part of Canephorus in the procession of my chattels. Where is the sunshade carrier? Ah! this stew-pot shall take his place. Great gods, how black it is! it could not be more so if Lysicrates had boiled the drugs in it with which he dyes his hair. Hither, my beautiful mirror. And you, my tripod, bear this urn for me; you shall be the water-bearer; and you, cock, whose morning song has so often roused me in the middle of the night to send me hurrying to the Assembly, you shall be my flute-girl. Scaphephorus, do you take the large basin, place in it the honeycombs and twine the olive-branches over them, bring the tripods and the phial of perfume; as for the humble crowd of little pots, I will just leave them behind.

CITIZEN *(watching CHREMES from a distance)*

What folly to carry one's goods to the common store; I have a little more sense than that. No, no, by Posidon, I want first to ponder and calculate over the thing at leisure. I shall not be fool enough to strip myself of the fruits of my toil and thrift, if it is not for a very good reason; let us see first which way things turn. *(He walks over to CHREMES)* Hi! friend, what means this display of goods? Are you moving or are you going to pawn your stuff?

## CHREMES

Neither.

CITIZEN

Why then are you setting all these things out in line? Is it a procession that you are starting off to Hiero, the public crier?

CHREMES

No, but in accordance with the new law that has been decreed, I am going to carry all these things to the market-place to make a gift of them to the state.

CITIZEN

Oh! bah! you don't mean that.

CHREMES

Certainly.

CITIZEN

Oh! Zeus the Deliverer! you unfortunate man!

CHREMES

Why?

CITIZEN

Why? It's as clear as noonday.

CHREMES

Must the laws not be obeyed then?

CITIZEN

What laws, you poor fellow?

CHREMES

Those that have been decreed.

CITIZEN

Decreed! Are you mad, I ask you?

CHREMES

Am I mad?

CITIZEN

Oh! this is the height of folly!

CHREMES

Because I obey the law?

CITIZEN

Is that the duty of a smart man?



CHREMES

Absolutely.

CITIZEN

Say rather of a ninny.

CHREMES

Don't you propose taking what belongs to you to the common stock?

CITIZEN

I'll take good care I don't until I see what the majority are doing.

CHREMES

There's but one opinion, namely, to contribute every single thing one has.

CITIZEN

I am waiting to see it, before I believe that.

CHREMES

At least, so they say in every street.

CITIZEN (*sardonically*)

And they will go on saying so.

CHREMES

Everyone talks of contributing all he has.

CITIZEN (*in the same tone*)

And will go on talking of it.

CHREMES

You weary me with your doubts and dubitations.

CITIZEN (*in the same tone*)

Everybody else will doubt it.

CHREMES

The pest seize you!

CITIZEN (*in the same tone*)

It will take you. (*Then seriously*) What? give up your goods! Is there a man of sense who will do such a thing? Giving is not one of our customs. Receiving is another matter; it's the way of the gods themselves. Look at the position of their hands on their statues; when we ask a favour, they present their hands turned palm up so as not to give, but to receive.

CHREMES

Wretch, let me do what is right. Come, I'll make a bundle of all these things. Where is my strap?

CITIZEN

Are you really going to carry them in?

CHREMES

Undoubtedly, and there are my two tripods strung together already.

CITIZEN

What folly! Not to wait to see what the others do, and then . . .

CHREMES

Well, and then what?

CITIZEN

. . . wait and put it off again.

CHREMES

What for?

CITIZEN

That an earthquake may come or an ill-omened flash of lightning, that a black cat may run across the street and no one carry in anything more, you fool!

CHREMES

It would be a fine thing if I were to find no room left for placing all this.

CITIZEN

You are much more likely to lose your stuff. As for placing it, you can be at ease, for there will be room enough as long as a month hence.

CHREMES

Why?

CITIZEN

I know these people; a decree is readily passed, but it is not so easily attended to.

CHREMES

All will contribute their property, my friend.

CITIZEN

But what if they don't?

CHREMES

But there is no doubt that they will.

CITIZEN (*insistently*)

But *anyhow*, what if they don't?

CHREMES

Do not worry; they will.

CITIZEN

And what if they oppose it?

CHREMES

We shall compel them to do so.

CITIZEN

And what if they prove the stronger?

CHREMES

I shall leave my goods and go off.

CITIZEN

And what if they sell them for you?

CHREMES

The plague take you!

CITIZEN

And if it does?

CHREMES

It will be a good riddance.

CITIZEN (*in an incredulous tone*)

You are really *bent* on contributing, then?

CHREMES

'Pon my soul, yes! Look, there are all my neighbours carrying in all they have.

CITIZEN (*sarcastically*)

Oh yes, it's Antisthenes; he's the type that *would* contribute! He would just as soon spend the next month sitting on the can.

CHREMES

The pest seize you!

CITIZEN

Will Callimachus, the chorus-master, contribute anything?

CHREMES

Why, more than Callias!

CITIZEN

The man must want to spend *all* his money!

CHREMES

How you weary me!

CITIZEN

Ah! I weary you? But, wretch, see what comes of decrees of this kind. Don't you remember the one reducing the price of salt?

CHREMES

Why, certainly I do.

CITIZEN

And do you remember that about the copper coinage?

CHREMES

Ah! that cursed money did me enough harm. I had sold my grapes and had my mouth stuffed with pieces of copper; indeed I was going to the market to buy flour, and was in the act of holding out my bag wide open, when the herald started shouting, "Let none in future accept pieces of copper; those of silver are alone current."

CITIZEN

And quite lately, were we not all swearing that the impost of one-fortieth, which Euripides had conceived, would bring five hundred talents to the state, and everyone was vaunting Euripides to the skies? But when the thing was looked at closely, it was seen that this fine decree was mere moonshine and would produce nothing, and you would have willingly burnt this very same Euripides alive.

CHREMES

The cases are quite different, my good fellow. We were the rulers then, but now it's the women.

CITIZEN

Whom, by Posidon, I will never allow to piss on my nose.

CHREMES

I don't know what the devil you're chattering about. Slave, pick up that bundle.

HERALD (*a woman*)

Let all citizens come, let them hasten at our leader's bidding! It is the new law. The lot will teach each citizen where he is to dine; the tables are already laid and loaded with the most exquisite dishes; the couches are covered with the softest of cushions; the wine and water are already being mixed in the ewers; the slaves are standing in a row and waiting to pour scent over the guests; the fish is being grilled, the hares are on the spit and the cakes are being kneaded, chaplets are being plaited and the fritters are frying; the youngest women are watching the pea-soup in the saucepans, and in the midst of them all stands Smoeus, dressed as a knight, washing the crockery. And Geron has come, dressed in a grand tunic and finely shod; he is joking with another young fellow and has already divested himself of his heavy shoes and his cloak. The pantry man is waiting, so come and use your jaws.

(*Exit*)

## CITIZEN

All right, I'll go. Why should I delay, since the state commands me?

## CHREMES

And where are you going to, since you have not deposited your belongings?

## CITIZEN

To the feast.

## CHREMES

If the women have any wits, they will first insist on your depositing your goods.

## CITIZEN

But I am going to deposit them.

## CHREMES

When?

## CITIZEN

I am not the man to make delays.

## CHREMES

How do you mean?

## CITIZEN

There will be many less eager than I.

## CHREMES

In the meantime you are going to dine.

CITIZEN

What else should I do? Every sensible man must give his help to the state.

CHREMES

But if admission is forbidden you?

CITIZEN

I shall duck my head and slip in.

CHREMES

And if the women have you beaten?

CITIZEN

I shall summon them.

CHREMES

And if they laugh in your face?

CITIZEN

I shall stand near the door . . .

CHREMES

And then?

CITIZEN

. . . and seize upon the dishes as they pass.

CHREMES

Then go there, but after me. Sicon and Parmeno, pick up all this baggage.

CITIZEN

Come, I will help you carry it

CHREMES (*pushing him away*)

No, no, I should be afraid of your pretending to the leader that what I am depositing belonged to you.

(*Exit with his belongings.*)

CITIZEN

Let me see! let me think of some good trick by which I can keep my goods and yet take my share of the common feast. (*He reflects for a moment.*) Ha! that's a fine idea! Quick! I'll go and dine, ha! ha!

(*Exit laughing*)

(*Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.*)

(*The scene shifts to a different section of Athens and the two houses are now to be thought of as those of two prostitutes.*)

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*leaning out of the window of one house*)

How is this? no men are coming? And yet it must be fully time! Then it is for naught that I have painted myself with white lead, dressed myself in my beautiful yellow robe, and that I am here, frolicking and humming between my teeth to attract some passer-by! Oh, Muses, alight upon my lips, inspire me with some soft Ionian love-song!

YOUNG GIRL (*in the window of the other house*)

You putrid old thing, you have placed yourself at the window before me. You were expecting to strip my vines during my absence and to trap some man in your snares with your songs. If you sing, I shall follow suit; all this singing will weary the spectators, but is nevertheless very pleasant and very diverting.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*thumbing her nose at the YOUNG GIRL*)

Ha! here is an old man; take him and lead him away. (*To the flute-player*) As for you, you young flute-player, let us hear some airs that are worthy of you and me.

(*She sings*)

Let him who wishes to taste pleasure come to my side. These young things know nothing about it; it's only the women of ripe age who understand the art of love, and no one could know how to fondle the lover who possessed me so well as myself, the young girls are all flightiness.

YOUNG GIRL (*singing in her turn*)

Don't be jealous of the young girls; voluptuousness resides in the pure outline of their beautiful limbs and blossoms on their rounded breasts; but you, old woman, you who are tricked out and perfumed as if for your own funeral, are an object of love only for grim Death himself.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*singing again*)

May your tongue be stopped; may you be unable to find your couch when you want to be loved. And on your couch, when your lips seek a lover, may you embrace only a viper!

YOUNG GIRL (*singing again*)

Alas! alas! what is to become of me? There is no lover! I am left here alone; my mother has gone out. (*Interrupting her song*) There's no need to mention the rest. (*Then singing again*) Oh! my dear nurse, I adjure you to call Orthagoras, and may heaven bless you. Ah! poor child, desire is consuming you like an Ionian woman; (*interrupting again*) and yet you are no stranger to the wanton arts of the Lesbian women. (*Resuming her song*) But you shall not rob me

of my pleasures; you will not be able to reduce or filch the time that first belongs to me.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Sing as much as you please, peep out like a cat lying in wait, but none shall pass through your door without first having been to see me.

YOUNG GIRL

If anyone enter your house, it will be to carry out your corpse. And that will be something new for you, you rotten old thing!

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Can anything be new to an old woman? My old age will not harm you.

YOUNG GIRL

Ah! shame on your painted cheeks!

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Why do you speak to me at all?

YOUNG GIRL

And why do you place yourself at the window?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

I am singing to myself about my lover, Epigenes.

YOUNG GIRL

Can you have any other lover than that old fop Geres?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Epigenes will show you that himself, for he is coming to me. See, here he is.

YOUNG GIRL

He's not thinking of you in the least.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Aye, but he is.

YOUNG GIRL

Old starveling! Let's see what he will do. I will leave my window.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

And I likewise You will see I am much wiser than you.

A YOUNG MAN (*sings*)

Ah! could I but sleep with the young girl without first making love to the old flat-nose! It is intolerable for a free-born man



FIRST OLD WOMAN (*singing to the same tune*)

Willy nilly, you must first gratify my desire. There shall be no nonsense about that, for my authority is the law and the law must be obeyed in a democracy.

(*Speaking*) But come, let me hide, to see what he's going to do. (*She retires.*)

YOUNG MAN

Ah! ye gods, if I were to find the sweet child alone! the wine has fired my lust.

YOUNG GIRL (*reappearing in her window*)

I have tricked that cursed old wretch; she has left her window, thinking I would stay at home. Ah! here is the lover we were talking of.

(*She sings*)

This way, my love, this way, come here and haste to rest the whole night in my arms. I worship your lovely curly hair; I am consumed with ardent desire. Oh! Eros, in thy mercy, compel him to my bed.

YOUNG MAN (*standing beneath the YOUNG GIRL's window and singing*)

Come down and haste to open the door unless you want to see me fall dead with desire. Dearest treasure, I am burning to yield myself to voluptuous sport, lying on your bosom, to let my hands play with your bottom. Aphrodité, why dost thou fire me with such delight in her? Oh! Eros, I beseech thee, have mercy and make her share my couch. Words cannot express the tortures I am suffering. Oh! my adored one, I adjure you, open your door for me and press me to your heart; 'tis for you that I am suffering. Oh! my jewel, my idol, you child of Aphrodité, the confidante of the Muses, the sister of the Graces, you living picture of voluptuousness, oh! open for me, press me to your heart, 'tis for you that I am suffering.

(*He knocks.*)

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*reappearing suddenly*)

What are you knocking for? Are you looking for me?

YOUNG MAN

What an idea!

FIRST OLD WOMAN

But you were tapping at the door.

YOUNG MAN

Death would be sweeter.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Why do you come with that torch in your hand?

YOUNG MAN

I am looking for a man from Anaphlystia.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

What's his name?

YOUNG MAN

Oh! it's not Sebinus, whom no doubt you are expecting.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*taking him by the arm*)

By Aphrodité, you *must*, whether you like it or not.

YOUNG MAN (*shaking her off*)

We are not now concerned with cases dated sixty years back; they are remanded for a later day; we are dealing only with those of less than twenty.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

That was under the old order of things, sweetheart, but now you must first busy yourself with us.

YOUNG MAN

Aye, *if I want to*, according to the rules of draughts, where we may either take or leave.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

But it's not according to the rules of draughts that you take your seat at the banquet.

YOUNG MAN

I don't know what you mean; it's at *this* door I want to knock.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*standing in his way*)

Not before knocking at mine first.

YOUNG MAN (*haughtily*)

For the moment I really have no need for old leather.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

I know that you love me; perhaps you are surprised to find me at the door. But come, let me kiss you.

YOUNG MAN (*pulling back; sarcastically*)

No, no, my dear, I am afraid of your lover.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Of whom?

YOUNG MAN

The most gifted of painters.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

And who is he?

YOUNG MAN

The artist who paints the little bottles on coffins. But get you indoors, lest he should find you at the door.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

I know what you want.

YOUNG MAN

I can say as much of you.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*hanging on to him*)

By Aphrodité, who has granted me this good chance, I won't let you go.

YOUNG MAN

You are drivelling, you little old hag.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Rubbish! I am going to lead you to my couch.

YOUNG MAN

What need for buying hooks? I will let her down to the bottom of the well and pull up the buckets with her old carcase, for she's crooked enough for that.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

A truce to your jeering, poor boy, and follow me.

YOUNG MAN

Nothing compels me to do so, unless you have paid the levy of five hundredths for me.<sup>13</sup>

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Look, by Aphrodité, there is nothing that delights me as much as sleeping with a lad of your years.

YOUNG MAN

And I abhor such as you, and I will never, never consent.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

But, by Zeus, here is something will force you to it.

*(She shows him a document.)*

YOUNG MAN

What's that?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

A decree, which orders you to enter my house.

YOUNG MAN

Read it out then, and let's hear.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Listen. "The women have decreed that if a young man desires a young girl, he can only lay her after having satisfied an old woman, and if he refuses and goes to seek the maiden, the old women are authorized to seize him and drag him in."

YOUNG MAN

Alas! I shall become a Procrustes.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Obey the law.

YOUNG MAN

But if a fellow-citizen, a friend, came to pay my ransom?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

No man may dispose of anything above a medimnus.

YOUNG MAN

But may I not enter an excuse?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

There's no evasion.

YOUNG MAN

I shall declare myself a merchant and so escape service.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Beware what you do!

YOUNG MAN

Well! what is to be done?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Follow me

YOUNG MAN

Is it absolutely necessary?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Yes, as surely as if Diomedes had commanded it.

YOUNG MAN

Well then, first spread out a layer of origanum upon four pieces of wood; bind fillets round your head, bring phials of scent and place a bowl filled with lustral water before your door.<sup>14</sup>

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Will you buy a chaplet for me too?

YOUNG MAN

Yes, if you outlast the tapers; for I expect to see you fall down dead as you go in.

YOUNG GIRL (*running out of her house*)

Where are you dragging this unfortunate man to?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

To my own bed.

YOUNG GIRL

That's not right. A young fellow like him is not of the age to suit you. You ought to be his mother rather than his wife. With these laws in force, the earth will be filled with Oedipuses.

(*She takes him away with her.*)

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Oh! you cursed pest! it's envy that makes you say this, but I will be revenged.

(*She goes back into her house.*)

YOUNG MAN

By Zeus the Deliverer, what a service you have done me, by freeing me of this old wretch! with what ardour I will show you my gratitude in a substantial form!

(*Just as he begins to go in with the YOUNG GIRL an even older and uglier woman enters.*)

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Hi! you there! where are you taking that young man to, in defiance of the law? The decree ordains that he must first sleep with me.

YOUNG MAN

Oh! what a misfortune! Where does *this* hag come from? She's a more frightful monster than the other even.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Come here.

(*She takes him by the arm.*)

YOUNG MAN (*to the YOUNG GIRL*)

Oh! I beg you, don't let me be led off by her!

SECOND OLD WOMAN

It's not I but the law that leads you off.

YOUNG MAN

No, it's not the law, but an Empusa with a body covered with blemishes and blotches.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Follow me, my handsome little friend, come along quickly without any more ado.

YOUNG MAN

Oh! let me go to the can first, so that I may gather my wits somewhat. Else I should be so terrified that you would see me letting out something yellow.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Never mind! you can crap, if you want, in my house.

YOUNG MAN

More than I want to, I'm afraid; but I offer you two good securities

SECOND OLD WOMAN

I don't require them

(*A THIRD OLD WOMAN, the ugliest yet, now appears*)

THIRD OLD WOMAN

Hi! friend, where are you off to with that woman?

YOUNG MAN

I am not going with her, but am being dragged by force. Oh! whoever you are, may heaven bless you for having had pity on me in my dire misfortune. (*Turns round and sees the THIRD OLD WOMAN.*) Oh Heracles! oh Pan! oh Corybantes! oh Dioscuri! Why, she is still more awful! Oh! what a monster! great gods! Are you an ape plastered with white lead, or the ghost of some old hag returned from the dark borderlands of death?

THIRD OLD WOMAN (*taking his other arm*)

No jesting! Follow me.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

No, come this way.

THIRD OLD WOMAN

I will never let you go.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Nor will I.

YOUNG MAN

But you will rend me asunder, you cursed wretches.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

I'm the one he must go with according to the law.

THIRD OLD WOMAN

Not if an uglier old woman than yourself appears.

YOUNG MAN

But if you kill me at the outset, how shall I afterwards go to find this beautiful girl of mine?

THIRD OLD WOMAN

That's your problem. But begin by obeying.

YOUNG MAN

Of which one must I rid myself first?

THIRD OLD WOMAN

Don't you know? Come here.

YOUNG MAN

Then let the other one release me.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Come to *my* house.

YOUNG MAN

If this dame will let me go.

THIRD OLD WOMAN

No, by all the gods, I'll not let you go.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Nor will I.

YOUNG MAN

You would make very bad boatwomen.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Why?

YOUNG MAN

Because you would tear your passengers to pieces in dragging them on board.

THIRD OLD WOMAN

Then come along, do, and hold your tongue.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

No, by Zeus, come with me.

YOUNG MAN

It's clearly a case for the decree of Cannonus; I must cut myself in two in order to lay you both. But how am I to work two oars at once?

THIRD OLD WOMAN

Easily enough, you have only to eat a full pot of onions<sup>15</sup>

YOUNG MAN

Oh! great gods! here I am close to the door and being dragged in!

SECOND OLD WOMAN (*to* THIRD OLD WOMAN)

You will gain nothing by this, for I shall rush into your house with you.

YOUNG MAN

Oh, no! no! better to suffer a single misfortune than two.

THIRD OLD WOMAN

Ah! by Hecat , whether you wish it or not . . .

YOUNG MAN

What a fate is mine, that I must make love to such a stinking harriidan the whole night through and all day; then, when I am rid of her, I have still to tackle a brick-coloured hag! Am I not truly unfortunate? Ah! by Zeus the Deliverer; under what fatal star must I have been born, that I must sail in company with such monsters! But if my bark sinks in the sewer of these strumpets, may I be buried at the very threshold of the door; let this hag be stood upright on my grave, let her be coated alive with pitch and her legs covered with molten lead up to the ankles, and let her be set alight as a funeral lamp.

(*The YOUNG MAN is dragged off by the two OLD WOMEN, one on each arm.*)

(*Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.*)



A SERVANT-MAID TO PRAXAGORA (*she comes from the banquet*)

What happiness is the people's! what joy is mine, and above all that of my mistress! Happy are ye, who form choruses before our house! Happy are ye, both neighbours and fellow-citizens! Happy am I myself! I am but a servant, and yet I have poured on my hair the most exquisite essences. Let thanks be rendered to thee, Oh, Zeus! But a still more delicious aroma is that of the wine of Thasos; its sweet bouquet delights the drinker for a long time, whereas the others lose their bloom and vanish quickly. Therefore, long life to the wine-jars of Thasos! Pour yourselves out unmixed wine, it will cheer you the whole night through, if you choose the liquor that possesses most fragrance. (*To the CHORUS*) But tell me, friends, where is my mistress's husband?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Wait for him here; he will no doubt pass this way.

MAID-SERVANT

Ah! there he is just going to dinner. Oh! master! what joy! what blessedness is yours!

BLEPYRUS

Mine?

MAID-SERVANT

None can compare his happiness to yours; you have reached its utmost height, you who, alone out of thirty thousand citizens have not yet dined.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Aye, here is undoubtedly a truly happy man.

MAID-SERVANT

Where are you off to?

BLEPYRUS

I am going to dine.

MAID-SERVANT

By Aphrodité, you will be the last of all, far and away the last. Yet my mistress has bidden me take you and take with you these young girls. Some Chian wine is left and lots of other good things. Therefore hurry, and invite likewise all the spectators whom we have pleased, and such of the judges as are not against us, to follow us; we will offer them everything they can desire.

## BLEPYRUS

Generously invite everyone and omit no one, old or young. Dinner is ready for all; they need only go home. As for me, I shall go to the banquet with the customary torch in my hand.

## MAID-SERVANT

But why do you tarry, Blepyrus? Take these young girls with you and, while you are away a while, I will whet my appetite with some dining-song.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I have but a few words to say. Let the wise judge me because of whatever is wise in this piece, and those who like a laugh by whatever has made them laugh. In this way I address pretty well everyone. If the lot has assigned my comedy to be played first of all, don't let that be a disadvantage to me; engrave in your memory all that shall have pleased you in it and judge the competitors equitably as you have bound yourselves by oath to do. Don't act like vile courtesans, who never remember any but their last lover.

## MAID-SERVANT

It is time, friends, high time to go to the banquet, if we want to have our share of it. Open your ranks and let the Cretan rhythms regulate your dances.

## BLEPYRUS

That's what I am doing.

## MAID-SERVANT

And you others, let your light steps too keep time. Very soon we'll be eating *lépadotémachosélachogálcokráníolcípisanodrímypotrimmatosílphiotýromélitokátakechýmēnokíchlēpikóssyphopháttoperísteraléktryonóptoképháliokinklopeleiolagōsiraíobaphétragalópterygón*.<sup>16</sup> Come, quickly, seize hold of a plate, snatch up a cup, and let's run to secure a place at table. The rest will have their jaws at work by this time.

CHORUS (*as they depart, dancing, with BLEPYRUS leading them*)

Dance gaily! *Iai' Iai' Iai'* We shall dine! *Euoi! Euai! Euai!* As for a triumph! *Euoi! Euoi! Euai! Euai!*

1. The operation of carding would expose the arms, and their soft and telltale contours would disastrously evince the sex of the carder.

2. It is not easy to see why Praxagora here substitutes the cat for the usual young pig. Rogers seems on the right track when he says that the word for the young pig, *choiridion*, meaning also "young female genitalia," was avoided by Praxagora in an "assembly of ladies," but the implication that this was motivated by considerations of delicacy is misguided and Victorian. The real point is, perhaps, that this word would have provoked a number of irrelevant and feminine remarks, and the revolutionary leader has for some time been energetically striving to bring her followers down to the serious business that lies before them.

3. This is the usual gibe at the bibulousness of the Athenian women.

4. An oath used by women only.

5. A reference to the alliance with Thebes that Athens had concluded in 395. It was quickly joined by other states and for a while there were high hopes, but like most such developments in fourth-century history, it came to little.

6. A reference to the Spartan invasions of Attica in the early years of the Peloponnesian War; the inhabitants of the rural districts sought refuge in the city, where they were very inadequately housed.

7. There is a pun here on the two senses of *hypokronein*, "to interrupt" and "to make love to."

8. Blepyrus personifies his intestinal urges under the name *Kopreios*, which is formed, in the usual manner of personal names, from *kopros*, "excrement."

9. The Greek is *Achradousios*, formed from *achras*, "wild pear" and at the same time suggesting the deme Acherdus.

10. These were signs of lateness; see note 2 on *The Acharnians*.

11. Praxagora's remark is merely an idiomatic phrase of abuse; Blepyrus understands, or affects to understand, it literally.

12. There is a pun here on the two Greek words *kaptain*, "to stuff" and *kappa*, the name of the letter K.

13. We do not know what the tax here referred to was, and the point

of the Young Man's remark is thus obscure; only one thing is clear, and this is that the rights of citizenship are involved. It may be that the Young Man may not rate as a slave unless a tax has been paid on his assessed value, but it is equally possible that the Old Woman may not derive the benefits of the new law until she has paid a capital levy of some sort.

14. These are the customary formalities connected with the laying-out of the dead.

15. The Greek word here translated as "onions" is *bolboi*; we do not know just what plant it signifies, but the ancient commentators know of its aphrodisiac effects, and these are sufficient to explain its use here.

16. This magnificent word, the longest that has ever been constructed in an Indo-Germanic language, is here merely transliterated from the Greek, and the accents indicate how it should be read. The precise signification of some of the components is not entirely certain, but so far as we can tell the ingredients of the dish are: limpets, slices of salt fish, thornbacks, whistle-fishes, cornel-berries, a remoulade of leftover brains seasoned with silphium and cheese, thrushes basted with honey, black-birds, ringdoves, squabs, chickens, fried mullets, wagtails, rock-pigeons, hare, and wings ground up in new wine that has been boiled down.

XI  
PLUTUS

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CHREMYLUS

CARIO, *Servant of Chremylus*

PLUTUS, *God of Riches*

BLEPSIDEMUS, *friend of Chremylus*

POVERTY

WIFE OF CHREMYLUS

A JUST MAN

AN INFORMER

AN OLD WOMAN

A YOUTH

HERMES

A PRIEST OF ZEUS

CHORUS OF RUSTICS

## INTRODUCTION

PRODUCED in 388, four years after *The Ecclesiazusac*, *Plutus* is the latest comedy of Aristophanes which we possess, although we know that he wrote at least two more, which were produced in the name of his son Ararus. We have no information regarding the festival at which the play was brought out, nor are we told what prize it won. It is the least amusing of the extant comedies, and its chief interest for the modern reader lies in the fact that it is the nearest thing to a representative of the Middle Comedy that has come down to us. The later centuries of the ancient world and the schoolmasters of the Byzantine Empire, however, were inordinately fond of it, the former because of what they regarded as its refinement, the latter because it only infrequently offended their moral tastes.

The subject of the play is the Utopian situation produced by the restoration to Plutus, the God of Wealth, of the sight of his eyes. Chremylus, the human hero of the play, has consulted the oracle of Apollo on the question of how his son may succeed in life without becoming a scoundrel, and the god has directed him to follow the first man he meets on leaving the temple. The object of the divine reference has turned out to be a dirty and disreputable blind man, and Chremylus has been dutifully dogging his heels ever since he first laid eyes on him. By the time the play begins Cario, the slave of Chremylus and a character much more of the New than of the Old Comedy, has quite lost patience with his master's latest foolishness and demands in no uncertain terms to know the reasons and the purposes of it. Chremylus explains, but Cario is far from convinced and insists on finding out who the blind man is. Plutus discloses his identity with the greatest reluctance, for ever since the malignity of Zeus had deprived him of his vision, he has experienced nothing but the worst of treatment at the hands of mankind every time he has revealed his name. At this point Chremylus is suddenly inspired with the magnificent idea that if the blindness of Plutus is healed, all the ills of human life will be rectified, and we remember *The Birds* and the birth of Pithetaerus' projects.

Plutus is sceptical at first, but Chremylus convinces him without too

much difficulty, and after dispatching his slave to fetch the husbandmen who are his boon companions, he takes the god into his house. The entrance of the Chorus has thus been motivated, and soon Cario comes in at the head of the rustic band, which plays a very unimportant rôle in the comedy. Chremylus comes out and greets his country neighbours, but their mutual felicitations are interrupted by the arrival of Blepsidemus, a friend of Chremylus, who finds much that is suspicious in the sudden affluence of the household. Once it has been made quite clear to him that he too stands to profit by the situation, his hostile attitude loses its principal or solitary *raison d'être* and he enthusiastically supports the proposals of Chremylus. At this point both friends are frightened out of their wits by the entrance of a woman of superhuman stature and terrifying aspect, looking for all the world like some Fury detached from a tragic chorus. She turns out to be Poverty, and Chremylus engages her in a long debate on the question of whether it is she or Plutus who most benefits mankind; the scene is the descendant and the souvenir of the Agon in the Old Comedy. Beaten in the argument, Poverty leaves the stage with laments and threats, but Chremylus laughs at these and summons Cario, with whom he takes Plutus to the temple of Asclepius to be healed of his blindness.

The stage is now left to the Chorus, and if we have not read *The Ecclesiazusac* we expect the delivery of the parabasis; all that we have is the indication that there was an interlude of dancing by the Chorus. We must, however, assume the lapse of a considerable amount of time during this, for the scene which follows consists mainly of Cario's amusing report of the miraculous cure that has been performed on Plutus, and in a little while the god himself returns, rejoicing in the light that he can see again and in the Utopia which he is about to materialize. The scenes which follow the return of Plutus are more reminiscent of the Old Comedy than anything else in the play, for they represent the familiar series of anonymous and typical characters who illustrate the various social effects of the revolution which has been effected in the first part of the comedy. Thus the poet brings in first the happy Just Man, for whom the world has only now become tolerable, and after him the Informer, who fails to arouse the pity which seems his only means of livelihood at present, the Old Woman, whose gigolo will now have no reason to consort with her, Hermes, who is unable to find any use for his rascally talents in the Utopian society that a seeing Plutus has established, and finally a priest of Zeus, whom the hunger induced by a sacrificeless profession has driven to transfer his services to the new lord of the universe. The comedy ends rather lamely with the assurance of Chremylus to the old woman that her young man will be with her this evening and the beginning of a sacred procession to install Plutus on the Acropolis.



If we make *Plutus* the first, rather than the last, comedy of Aristophanes that we read, we find it a sufficiently amusing play, but if we come to it fresh from *Peace* or *The Thesmophoriazusae* it is a singularly disappointing performance. One may suspect, however, that if we knew the history of Athens as intimately from 410 to 388 as we know it from 431 to 411 we should be astonished at the resistance to change exhibited by the Old Comedy. The thirty-seven years between *The Acharnians* and *Plutus* brought with them an amount of alteration of the form and the spirit of comedy that is impressive and depressing enough, but the changes in the social and economic life of Athens during this period were incomparably greater.

## PLUTUS

(SCENE.—*The Orchestra represents a public square in Athens. In the background is the house of CHREMYLUS. A ragged old blind man enters, followed by CHREMYLUS and his slave CARIO.*)

CARIO

WHAT an unhappy fate, great gods, to be the slave of a fool! A servant may give the best of advice, but if his master does not follow it, the poor slave must inevitably have his share in the disaster; for fortune does not allow him to dispose of his own body, it belongs to his master who has bought it. Alas! 'tis the way of the world. But the god, Apollo (*in tragic style*), whose oracles the Pythian priestess on her golden tripod makes known to us, deserves my censure, for surely he is a physician and a cunning diviner; and yet my master is leaving his temple infected with mere madness and insists on following a blind man. Is this not opposed to all good sense? It is for us, who see clearly, to guide those who don't; whereas he clings to the trail of a blind fellow and compels me to do the same without answering my questions with ever a word. (*To CHREMYLUS*) Aye, master, unless you tell me why we are following this unknown fellow, I will not be silent, but I will worry and torment you, for you cannot beat me because of my sacred chaplet of laurel.

CHREMYLUS

No, but if you worry me I will take off your chaplets, and then you will only get a sounder thrashing.

CARIO

That's an old song! I am going to leave you no peace till you have told me who this man is; and if I ask it, it's entirely because of my interest in you.

CHREMYLUS

Well, be it so. I will reveal it to you as being the most faithful and the most rascally of all my servants. I honoured the gods and did what was right, and yet I was none the less poor and unfortunate.

CARIO

I know it but too well.

CHREMYLUS

Others amassed wealth—the sacrilegious, the demagogues, the informers, indeed every sort of rascal.

CARIO

I believe you.

CHREMYLUS

Therefore I came to consult the oracle of the god, not on my own account, for my unfortunate life is nearing its end, but for my only son; I wanted to ask Apollo if it was necessary for him to become a thorough knave and renounce his virtuous principles, since that seemed to me to be the only way to succeed in life.

CARIO (*with ironic gravity*)

And with what responding tones did the sacred tripod resound?

CHREMYLUS

You shall know. The god ordered me in plain terms to follow the first man I should meet upon leaving the temple and to persuade him to accompany me home.

CARIO

And who was the first one you met?

CHREMYLUS

This blind man.

CARIO

And you are stupid enough not to understand the meaning of such an answer? Why, the god was advising you thereby, and that in the clearest possible way, to bring up your son according to the fashion of your country.

CHREMYLUS

What makes you think that?

CARIO

Is it not evident to the blind, that nowadays to do nothing that is right is the best way to get on?

CHREMYLUS

No, that is not the meaning of the oracle; there must be another that is nobler. If this blind man would tell us who he is and why and with what

object he has led us here, we should no doubt understand what our oracle really does mean.

CARIO (*to PLUTUS*)

Come, tell us at once who you are, or I shall give effect to my threat. (*He menaces him.*) And quick too, be quick, I say.

PLUTUS

I'll thrash you.

CARIO (*to CHREMYLUS*)

Do you understand who he says he is?

CHREMYLUS

It's to you and not to me that he replies thus: your mode of questioning him was ill-advised. (*To PLUTUS*) Come, friend, if you care to oblige an honest man, answer me.

PLUTUS

I'll knock you down.

CARIO (*sarcastically*)

Ah! what a pleasant fellow and what a delightful prophecy the god has given you!

CHREMYLUS (*to PLUTUS*)

By Demeter, you'll have no reason to laugh presently.

CARIO

If you don't speak, you wretch, I will surely do you an ill turn.

PLUTUS

Friends, take yourselves off and leave me.

CHREMYLUS

That we very certainly shan't.

CARIO

This, master, is the best thing to do. I'll undertake to secure him the most frightful death; I will lead him to the verge of a precipice and then leave him there, so that he'll break his neck when he pitches over.

CHREMYLUS

Well then, seize him right away.

(*CARIO does so.*)

PLUTUS

Oh, no! Have mercy!

CHREMYLUS

Will thou speak then?

PLUTUS

But if you learn who I am, I know well that you will ill-use me and will not let me go again.

CHREMYLUS

I call the gods to witness that you have naught to fear if you will only speak.

PLUTUS

Well then, first unhand me.

CHREMYLUS

There! we set you free.

PLUTUS

Listen then, since I must reveal what I had intended to keep a secret. I am Plutus.

CARIO

Oh! you wretched rascal! You Plutus all the while, and you never said so!

CHREMYLUS

You, Plutus, and in this piteous guise! Oh, Phoebus Apollo! oh, ye gods of heaven and hell! Oh, Zeus! is it really and truly as you say?

PLUTUS

Yes.

CHREMYLUS

Plutus' very own self?

PLUTUS

His own very self and none other.

CHREMYLUS

But tell me, how come you're so squalid?

PLUTUS

I have just left Patrocles' house, who has not had a bath since his birth.

CHREMYLUS

But your infirmity; how did that happen? Tell me.

## PLUTUS

Zeus inflicted it on me, because of his jealousy of mankind. When I was young, I threatened him that I would only go to the just, the wise, the men of ordered life; to prevent my distinguishing these, he struck me with blindness! so much does he envy the good!

## CHIREMYLUS

And yet, it's only the upright and just who honour him.

## PLUTUS

Quite true.

## CHIREMYLUS

Therefore, if ever you recovered your sight, you would shun the wicked?

## PLUTUS

Undoubtedly.

## CHIREMYLUS

You would visit the good?

## PLUTUS

Assuredly. It is a very long time since I saw them.

CARIO (*to the audience*)

That's not astonishing. I, who see clearly, don't see a single one.

## PLUTUS

Now let me leave you, for I have told you everything.

## CHIREMYLUS

No, certainly not! we shall fasten ourselves on to you faster than ever.

## PLUTUS

Did I not tell you, you were going to plague me?

## CHIREMYLUS

Oh! I adjure you, believe what I say and don't leave me; for you will seek in vain for a more honest man than myself.

## CARIO

There is only one man more worthy; and that is I.

## PLUTUS

All talk like this, but as soon as they secure my favours and grow rich, their wickedness knows no bounds.

CHREMYLUS

And yet all men are not wicked.

PLUTUS

All. There's no exception.

CARIO

You shall pay for that opinion.

CHREMYLUS

Listen to what happiness there is in store for you, if you but stay with us. I have hope; aye, I have good hope with the god's help to deliver you from that blindness, in fact to restore your sight.

PLUTUS

Oh! do nothing of the kind, for I don't wish to recover it.

CHREMYLUS

What's that you say?

CARIO

This fellow hugs his own misery.

PLUTUS

If you were mad enough to cure me, and Zeus heard of it, he would overwhelm me with his anger.

CHREMYLUS

And is he not doing this now by leaving you to grope your wandering way?

PLUTUS

I don't know; but I'm horribly afraid of him.

CHREMYLUS

Indeed? Ah! you are the biggest poltroon of all the gods! Why, Zeus with his throne and his lightnings would not be worth an obolus if you recovered your sight, were it but for a few moments.

PLUTUS

Impious man, don't talk like that.

CHREMYLUS

Fear nothing! I will prove to you that you are far more powerful and mightier than he.

PLUTUS

I mightier than he?

CHREMYLUS

Aye, by heaven! (*To CARIO*) For instance, what is the basis of the power that Zeus wields over the other gods?

CARIO

Money; he has so much of it.

CHREMYLUS

And who gives it to him?

CARIO (*pointing to Plutus*)

This fellow.

CHREMYLUS

If sacrifices are offered to him, is not Plutus their cause?

CARIO

Undoubtedly, for it's wealth that all demand and clamour most loudly for.

CHREMYLUS

Thus it's Plutus who is the fount of all the honours rendered to Zeus, whose worship he can wither up at the root, if it so pleases him.

PLUTUS

And how so?

CHREMYLUS

Not an ox, nor a cake, nor indeed anything at all could be offered, if you did not wish it.

PLUTUS

Why?

CHREMYLUS

Why? but what means are there to buy anything if you are not there to give the money? Hence if Zeus should cause you any trouble, you will destroy his power without other help.

PLUTUS

So it's because of me that sacrifices are offered to him?

CHREMYLUS

Most assuredly. Whatever is dazzling, beautiful or charming in the eyes of mankind, comes from you. Does not everything depend on wealth?



CARIO

I myself was bought for a few coins; if I'm a slave, it's only because I was not rich.

CHIREMYLUS

And what of the Corinthian whores? If a poor man offers them proposals, they do not listen; but if it be a rich one, instantly they turn their arses to him.

CARIO

It's the same with the lads; they care not for love, to them money means everything.

CHIREMYLUS

You speak of male whores; yet some of them are honest, and it's not money they ask of their patrons.

CARIO

What then?

CHIREMYLUS

A fine horse, a pack of hounds.

CARIO

Yes, they would blush to ask for money and cleverly disguise their shame.

CHIREMYLUS

It is in you that every art, all human inventions, have had their origin; it is through you that one man sits cutting leather in his shop.

CARIO

That another fashions iron or wood.

CHIREMYLUS

That yet another chases the gold he has received from you.

CARIO

That one is a fuller.

CHIREMYLUS

That the other washes wool.

CARIO

That this one is a tanner.

CHIREMYLUS

And that other sells onions.

CARIO

And if the adulterer, caught red-handed, is depilated, it's on account of you.

PLUTUS

Oh! great gods! I knew naught of all this!

CARIO (*to* CHREMYLUS)

Is it not he who lends the Great King all his pride? Is it not he who draws the citizens to the Assembly?

CHREMYLUS

And tell me, is it not you who equip the triremes?

CARIO

And who feed our mercenaries at Corinth? Are not you the cause of Pamphilus' sufferings?

CHREMYLUS

And of the needle-seller's with Pamphilus?

CARIO

It is not because of you that Agyrrhius farts so loudly?

CHREMYLUS

And that Philepsius rolls off his fables? That troops are sent to succour the Egyptians? And that Lais is kept by Philonides?

CARIO

That the tower of Timotheus . . .

CHREMYLUS

. . . (*To* CARIO) May it fall upon your head! (*To* PLUTUS) In short, Plutus, it is through you that everything is done; you must realize that you are the sole cause both of good and evil.

CARIO

In war, it's the flag under which you serve that victory favours.

PLUTUS

What! I can do so many things by myself and unaided?

CHREMYLUS

And many others besides; wherefore men are never tired of your gifts. They get weary of all else,—of love . . .

CARIO

Bread.

CHREMYLUS

Music.

CARIO

Sweetmeats.

CHREMYLUS

Honours.

CARIO

Cakes.

CHREMYLUS

Battles.

CARIO

Figs.

CHREMYLUS

Ambition.

CARIO

Gruel.

CHREMYLUS

Military advancement.

CARIO

Lentil soup.

CHREMYLUS

But of you they never tire. If a man has thirteen talents, he has all the greater ardour to possess sixteen; if that wish is achieved, he will want forty or will complain that he knows not how to make both ends meet.

PLUTUS

All this, I suppose, is very true; there is but one point that makes me feel a bit uneasy.

CHREMYLUS

And that is?

PLUTUS

How could I use this power, which you say I have?

CHREMYLUS

Ah! they were quite right who said there's nothing more timorous than Plutus.

PLUTUS

No, no; it was a thief who calumniated me. Having broken into a house, he found everything locked up and could take nothing, so he dubbed my prudence fear.

CHREMYLUS

Don't be disturbed; if you support me zealously, I'll make you more sharp-sighted than Lynceus.

PLUTUS

And how should you be able to do that, you, who are but a mortal?

CHREMYLUS

I have great hope, after the answer Apollo gave me, shaking his sacred laurels the while.

PLUTUS

Is *he* in the plot then?

CHREMYLUS

Surely.

PLUTUS

Take care what you say.

CHREMYLUS

Never fear, friend; for, be well assured, that if it has to cost me my life, I will carry out what I have in my head.

CARIO

And I will help you, if you permit it.

CHREMYLUS

We shall have many other helpers as well—all the worthy folk who are wanting for bread.

PLUTUS

Ah! they'll prove sorry helpers.

CHREMYLUS

No, not so, once they've grown rich. But you, Cario, run quick . . .

CARIO

Where?

## CHREMYLUS

. . . to call my comrades, the other husbandmen (you'll probably find the poor fellows toiling away in the fields), that each of them may come here to take his share of the gifts of Plutus.

## CARIO

I'm off. But let someone come from the house to take this morsel of meat.<sup>1</sup>

## CHREMYLUS

I'll see to that; you run your hardest. As for you, Plutus, the most excellent of all the gods, come in here with me; this is the house you must fill with riches to-day, by fair means or foul.

## PLUTUS

I don't at all like going into other folks' houses in this manner; I have never got any good from it. If I got inside a miser's house, straightway he would bury me deep underground; if some honest fellow among his friends came to ask him for the smallest coin, he would deny ever having seen me. Then if I went to a fool's house, he would sacrifice in dicing and wenching, and very soon I should be completely stripped and pitched out of doors.

## CHREMYLUS

That's because you have never met a man who knew how to avoid the two extremes; moderation is the strong point in my character. I love saving as much as anybody, and I know how to spend, when it's needed. But let us go in; I want to make you known to my wife and to my only son, whom I love most of all after yourself.

## PLUTUS

I'm quite sure of that.

## CHREMYLUS

Why should I hide the truth from you?

*(They enter CHREMYLUS' house.)*

CARIO *(to the CHORUS, which has followed him in)*

Come, you active workers, who, like my master, eat nothing but garlic and the poorest food, you who are his friends and his neighbours, hasten your steps, hurry yourselves; there's not a moment to lose; this is the critical hour, when your presence and your support are needed by him.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why, don't you see we are speeding as fast as men can, who are already enfeebled by age? But do you deem it fitting to make us run like this before ever telling us why your master has called us?

## CARIO

I've grown hoarse with the telling, but you won't listen. My master is going to drag you all out of the stupid, sapless life you are leading and ensure you one full of all delights.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And how is he going to manage that?

## CARIO

My poor friends, he has brought with him a disgusting old fellow, all bent and wrinkled, with a most pitiful appearance, bald and toothless; upon my word, I even believe he is circumcised like some vile barbarian.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This news is worth its weight in gold! What are you saying? Repeat it to me; no doubt it means he is bringing back a heap of wealth.

## CARIO

No, but a heap of all the infirmities attendant on old age.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you are tricking us, you shall pay us for it. Beware of our sticks!

## CARIO

Do you deem me so brazen as all that, and my words mere lies?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What serious airs the rascal puts on! Look! his legs are already shrieking, "oh! oh!" They are asking for the shackles and wedges.

## CARIO

It's in the tomb that it's your lot to judge. Why don't you go there? Charon has given you your ticket.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Plague take you! you cursed rascal, who rail at us and have not even the heart to tell us why your master has made us come. We were pressed for time and tired out, yet we came with all haste, and in our hurry we have passed by lots of wild onions without even gathering them.

## CARIO

I will no longer conceal the truth from you. Friends, it's Plutus whom my master brings, Plutus, who will give you riches.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What! we shall really all become rich?

## CARIO

Aye, certainly; you will then be Midases, provided you grow ass's ears.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What joy, what happiness! If what you tell me is true, I long to dance with delight.

CARIO (*singing, with appropriate gestures*)

And I too, *threttanelo!* "I want to imitate the Cyclops and lead your troop by stamping like this. Do you, my dear little ones, cry, aye, cry again and bleat forth the plaintive song of the sheep and of the stinking goats; follow me like lascivious goats with their tools out.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

(*Singing, to the same tune and with similar mimicry*)

As for us, *threttanelo!* we will seek you, dear Cyclops, bleating, and if we find you with your wallet full of fresh herbs, all disgusting in your filth, sodden with wine and sleeping in the midst of your sheep, we will seize a great flaming stake and burn out your eye.

## CARIO

I will copy that Circé of Corinth, whose potent philtres compelled the companions of Philonides like swine to swallow balls of dung, which she herself had kneaded with her hands; and do you too grunt with joy and follow your mother, my little pigs.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! Circé with the potent philtres, who besmear your companions so filthily, what pleasure I shall have in imitating the son of Laertes! I will hang you up by your balls, I will rub your nose with dung like a goat, and like Aristyllus you shall say through your half-opened lips, "Follow your mother, my little pigs."

## CARIO

Enough of tomfoolery, assume a grave demeanour; unknown to my master I am going to take bread and meat; and when I have fed well, I shall resume my work.

(*Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.*)

CHIREMYLUS (*coming out of his house*)

To say, "Hail! my dear neighbours!" is an old form of greeting and well worn with use; so therefore I embrace you, because you have not crept like tortoises, but have come rushing here in all haste. Now help me to watch carefully and closely over the god.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Be at ease. You shall see with what martial zeal I will guard him. What! we jostle each other at the Assembly for three obols, and am I going to let Plutus in person be stolen from me?

## CHREMYLUS

But I see Blepsidemus; by his bearing and his haste I can readily see he knows or suspects something.

## BLEPSIDEMUS

What has happened then? Whence, how has Chremylus suddenly grown rich? I don't believe a word of it. Nevertheless, nothing but his sudden fortune was being talked about in the barber-shops. But I am above all surprised that his good fortune has not made him forget his friends; that is not the usual way!

## CHREMYLUS

By the gods, Blepsidemus, I will hide nothing from you. To-day things are better than yesterday; let us share, for are you not my friend?

## BLEPSIDEMUS

Have you really grown rich as they say?

## CHREMYLUS

I shall be soon, if the god agrees to it. But there is still some risk to run.

## BLEPSIDEMUS

What risk?

## CHREMYLUS

Well . . .

## BLEPSIDEMUS

Tell me, quick!

## CHREMYLUS

If we succeed, we are happy for ever, but if we fail, it is all over with us.

## BLEPSIDEMUS

It's a bad business, and one that doesn't please me! To grow rich all at once and yet to be fearful! ah! I suspect something that's little good.

## CHREMYLUS

What do you mean?



BLEPSIDEMUS

No doubt you have just stolen some gold and silver from some temple and are repenting.

CHIREMYLUS

Nay! heaven preserve me from that!

BLEPSIDEMUS

A truce to idle phrases! the thing is only too apparent, my friend.

CHIREMYLUS

Don't suspect such a thing of me.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Alas! then there is no honest man! not one, that can resist the attraction of gold!

CHIREMYLUS

By Demeter, you have no common sense.

BLEPSIDEMUS (*aside*)

How he has changed!

CHIREMYLUS

But, good gods, you are mad, my dear fellow!

BLEPSIDEMUS (*aside*)

His very look is distraught; he has done some crime!

CHIREMYLUS

Ah! I know the tune you are playing now; you think I have stolen, and want your share.

BLEPSIDEMUS

My share of what, pray?

CHIREMYLUS

You are beside the mark; the thing is quite otherwise.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Perhaps it's not a theft, but some piece of knavery!

CHIREMYLUS

You are insane!

BLEPSIDEMUS

What? You have done no man an injury?

CHREMYLUS

No! assuredly not!

BLEPSIDEMUS

But, great gods, what am I to think? You won't tell me the truth.

CHREMYLUS

You accuse me without really knowing anything.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Listen, friend, no doubt the matter can yet be hushed up, before it gets noised abroad, at trifling expense; I will buy the orators' silence.

CHREMYLUS

Aye, you will lay out three minae and, as my friend, you will reckon twelve against me.

BLEPSIDEMUS

I know someone who will come and seat himself at the foot of the tribunal, holding a suppliant's bough in his hand and surrounded by his wife and children, for all the world like the *Heracidae* of Pamphilus.

CHREMYLUS

Not at all, poor fool! But, thanks to me, worthy folk alone shall be rich henceforth.

BLEPSIDEMUS

What are you saying? Have you then stolen so much as all that?

CHREMYLUS

Oh! your insults will be the death of me.

BLEPSIDEMUS

You're the one who is courting death.

CHREMYLUS

Not so, you wretch, since I have Plutus.

BLEPSIDEMUS

You have Plutus? Which one?

CHREMYLUS

The god himself.

BLEPSIDEMUS

And where is he?

CHREMYLUS

There.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Where?

CHREMYLUS

Indoors.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Indoors?

CHREMYLUS

Aye, certainly.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Get you gone! Plutus in your house?

CHREMYLUS

Yes, by the gods!

BLEPSIDEMUS

Are you telling the truth?

CHREMYLUS

I am.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Swear it by Hestia.

CHREMYLUS

I swear it by Posidon.

BLEPSIDEMUS

The god of the sea?

CHREMYLUS

Yes, and by all the other Posidons, if such there be.

BLEPSIDEMUS

And you don't send him to us, to your friends?

CHREMYLUS

We've not got to that point yet.

BLEPSIDEMUS

What do you say? Is there no chance of sharing?

CHREMYLUS

Why, no. We must first . . .

BLEPSIDEMUS

Do what?

CHREMYLUS

. . . restore him his sight.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Restore whom his sight? Speak!

CHREMYLUS

Plutus. It must be done, no matter how.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Is he then really blind?

CHREMYLUS

Yes, undoubtedly.

BLEPSIDEMUS

I am no longer surprised he never came to me.

CHREMYLUS

If it please the gods, he'll come there now.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Must we not go and seek a physician?

CHREMYLUS

Seek physicians at *Athens*? Nay! there's no art where there's no fee.<sup>a</sup>BLEPSIDEMUS (*running his eyes over the audience*)

Let's look carefully.

CHREMYLUS (*after a thorough survey*)

There is not one.

BLEPSIDEMUS

It's a positive fact; I don't know of one.

CHREMYLUS

But I have thought the matter well over, and the best thing is to make Plutus lie in the Temple of Asclepius.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Unquestionably that's the very best thing. Hurry and lead him away to the temple.

CHREMYLUS

I am going there.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Then hurry up.

CHREMYLUS

That's just what I am doing.

*(They are just leaving when POVERTY comes running in; she is a picture of squalor and the two men recoil in horror.)*

POVERTY

Unwise, perverse, unholy men! What are you daring to do, you pitiful, wretched mortals? Whither are you flying? Stop! I command it!

BLEPSIDEMUS

Oh! great gods!

POVERTY

My arm shall destroy you, you infamous beings! Such an attempt is not to be borne; neither man nor god has ever dared the like. You shall die!

CHREMYLUS

And who are you? Oh! what a ghastly pallor!

BLEPSIDEMUS

Perhaps it's some Erinyes, some Fury, from the theatre; there's a kind of wild tragic look in her eyes.

CHREMYLUS

But she has no torch.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Let's knock her down!

POVERTY

Who do you think I am?

CHREMYLUS

Some wine-shop keeper or egg-woman. Otherwise you would not have shrieked so loud at us, who have done nothing to you.

POVERTY

Indeed? And have you not done me the most deadly injury by seeking to banish me from every country?

CHREMYLUS

Why, have you not got the Barathrum left? But who are you? Answer me quickly!

POVERTY

I am one that will punish you this very day for having wanted to make me disappear from here.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Might it be the tavern-keeper in my neighbourhood, who is always cheating me in measure?

POVERTY

I am Poverty, who have lived with you for so many years.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Oh! great Apollo! oh, ye gods! whither shall I fly?

*(He starts to run away.)*

CHREMYLUS

Here! what are you doing! You coward! Are going to leave me here?

BLEPSIDEMUS *(still running)*

Not I.

CHREMYLUS

Stop then! Are two men to run away from one woman?

BLEPSIDEMUS

But, you wretch, it's Poverty, the most fearful monster that ever drew breath.

CHREMYLUS

Stay where you are, I beg of you.

BLEPSIDEMUS

No! no! a thousand times, no!

CHREMYLUS

Could we do anything worse than leave the god in the lurch and fly before this woman without so much as ever offering to fight?

BLEPSIDEMUS

But what weapons have we? Are we in a condition to show fight? Where is the breastplate, the buckler, that this wretch has not pawned?

CHREMYLUS

Be at ease. Plutus will readily triumph over her threats unaided.

## POVERTY

Dare you reply, you scoundrels, you who are caught red-handed at the most horrible crime?

## CHREMYLUS

As for you, you cursed jade, you pursue me with your abuse, though I have never done you the slightest harm.

## POVERTY

Do you think it is doing me no harm to restore Plutus to the use of his eyes?

## CHREMYLUS

Is this doing you harm, that we shower blessings on all men?

## POVERTY

And what do you think will ensure their happiness?

## CHREMYLUS

Ah! first of all we shall drive you out of Greece.

## POVERTY

Drive me out? Could you do mankind a greater harm?

## CHREMYLUS

Yes—if I gave up my intention to deliver them from you.

## POVERTY

Well, let us discuss this point first. I propose to show that I am the sole cause of all your blessings, and that your safety depends on me alone. If I don't succeed, then do what you like to me.

## CHREMYLUS

How dare you talk like this, you impudent hussy?

## POVERTY

Agree to hear me and I think it will be very easy for me to prove that you are entirely on the wrong road, when you want to make the just men wealthy.

## BLEPSIDEMUS

Oh! cudgel and rope's end, come to my help!

## POVERTY

Why such wrath and these shouts, before you hear my arguments?

## BLEPSIDEMUS

But who could listen to such words without exclaiming?

## POVERTY

Any man of sense.

## CHREMYLUS

But if you lose your case, what punishment will you submit to?

## POVERTY

Choose what you will.

## CHREMYLUS

That's all right.

## POVERTY

You shall suffer the same if you are beaten!

## CHREMYLUS

Do you think twenty deaths a sufficiently large stake?

## BLEPSIDEMUS

Good enough for her, but for us two would suffice.

## POVERTY

You won't escape, for is there indeed a single valid argument to oppose me with?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

To beat her in this debate, you must call upon all your wits. Make no allowances and show no weakness!

## CHREMYLUS

It is right that the good should be happy, that the wicked and the impious, on the other hand, should be miserable; that is a truth, I believe, which no one will gainsay. To realize this condition of things is a proposal as great as it is noble and useful in every respect, and we have found a means of attaining the object of our wishes. If *Plutus* recovers his sight and ceases from wandering about unseeing and at random, he will go to seek the just men and never leave them again; he will shun the perverse and ungodly; so, thanks to him, all men will become honest, rich and pious. Can anything better be conceived for the public weal?

## BLEPSIDEMUS

Of a certainty, no! I bear witness to that. It is not even necessary she should reply.

## CHREMYLUS

Does it not seem that everything is extravagance in the world, or rather madness, when you watch the way things go? A crowd of rogues enjoy



blessings they have won by sheer injustice, while more honest folks are miserable, die of hunger, and spend their whole lives with you. Now, if Plutus became clear-sighted again and drove out Poverty, it would be the greatest blessing possible for the human race.

POVERTY

Here are two old men, whose brains are easy to confuse, who assist each other to talk rubbish and drivel to their hearts' content. But if your wishes were realized, your profit would be great! Let Plutus recover his sight and divide his favours out equally to all, and none will ply either trade or art any longer; all toil would be done away with. Who would wish to hammer iron, build ships, sew, turn, cut up leather, bake bricks, bleach linen, tan hides, or break up the soil of the earth with the plough and garner the gifts of Demeter, if he could live in idleness and free from all this work?

CHREMYLUS

What nonsense all this is! All these trades which you just mention will be plied by our slaves.

POVERTY

Your slaves! And by what means will these slaves be got?

CHREMYLUS

We will buy them.

POVERTY

But first say, who will sell them, if everyone is rich?

CHREMYLUS

Some greedy dealer from Thessaly—the land which supplies so many.

POVERTY

But if your system is applied, there won't be a single slave-dealer left. What rich man would risk his life to devote himself to this traffic? You will have to toil, to dig and submit yourself to all kinds of hard labour; so that your life would be more wretched even than it is now.

CHREMYLUS

May this prediction fall upon yourself!

POVERTY

You will not be able to sleep in a bed, for no more will ever be manufactured; nor on carpets, for who would weave them, if he had gold? When you bring a young bride to your dwelling, you will have no essences wherewith to perfume her, nor rich embroidered cloaks dyed with dazzling

colours in which to clothe her. And yet what is the use of being rich, if you are to be deprived of all these enjoyments? On the other hand, you have all that you need in abundance, thanks to me; to the artisan I am like a severe mistress, who forces him by need and poverty to seek the means of earning his livelihood.

CHREMYLUS

And what good thing can you give us, unless it be burns in the bath,<sup>4</sup> and swarms of brats and old women who cry with hunger, and clouds uncountable of lice, gnats and flies, which hover about the wretch's head, trouble him, awake him and say, "You will be hungry, but get up!" Besides, to possess a rag in place of a mantle, a pallet of rushes swarming with bugs, that do not let you close your eyes, for a bed; a rotten piece of matting for a coverlet; a big stone for a pillow, on which to lay your head; to eat mallow roots instead of bread, and leaves of withered radish instead of cake; to have nothing but the cover of a broken jug for a stool, the stave of a cask, and broken at that, for a kneading-trough, that is the life you make for us! Are these the mighty benefits with which you pretend to load mankind?

POVERTY

It's not my life that you describe; you are attacking the existence beggars lead.

CHREMYLUS

Is Beggary not Poverty's sister?

POVERTY

Thrasylbulus and Dionysius are one and the same according to you. No, my life is not like that and never will be. The beggar, whom you have depicted to us, never possesses anything. The poor man lives thriftily and attentive to his work; he has not got too much, but he does not lack what he really needs.

CHREMYLUS

Oh! what a happy life, by Demeter! to live sparingly, to toil incessantly and not to leave enough to pay for a tomb!

POVERTY

That's it! Jest, jeer, and never talk seriously! But what you don't know is this, that men with me are worth more, both in mind and body, than with Plutus. With him they are gouty, big-bellied, heavy of limb and scandalously stout; with me they are thin, wasp-waisted, and terrible to the foe.

## CHREMYLUS

No doubt it's by starving them that you give them that waspish waist.

## POVERTY

As for behaviour, I will prove to you that modesty dwells with me and insolence with Plutus.

## CHREMYLUS

Oh! the sweet modesty of stealing and burglary.

## POVERTY

Look at the orators in our republics; as long as they are poor, both state and people can only praise their uprightness; but once they are fattened on the public funds, they conceive a hatred for justice, plan intrigues against the people and attack the democracy.

## CHREMYLUS

That is absolutely true, although your tongue is very vile. But it matters not, so don't put on those triumphant airs; you shall not be punished any the less for having tried to persuade me that poverty is worth more than wealth.

## POVERTY

Not being able to refute my arguments, you chatter at random and exert yourself to no purpose.

## CHREMYLUS

Then tell me this, why does all mankind flee from you?

## POVERTY

Because I make them better. Children do the very same; they flee from the wise counsels of their fathers. So difficult is it to see one's true interest.

## CHREMYLUS

Will you say that Zeus cannot discern what is best? Well, he takes Plutus to himself . . .

## BLEPSIDEMUS

. . . and banishes Poverty to the earth.

## POVERTY

Ah me! how purblind you are, you old fellows of the days of Cronus! Why, Zeus is poor, and I will clearly prove it to you. In the Olympic games, which he founded, and to which he convokes the whole of Greece every four years, why does he only crown the victorious athletes with wild olive? If he were rich he would give them gold.

## CHREMYLUS

That's the way he shows that he clings to his wealth; he is sparing with it, won't part with any portion of it, only bestows baubles on the victors and keeps his money for himself.

## POVERTY

But wealth coupled to such sordid greed is yet more shameful than poverty.

## CHREMYLUS

May Zeus destroy you, both you and your chaplet of wild olive!

## POVERTY

Thus you dare to maintain that Poverty is not the fount of all blessings!

## CHREMYLUS

Ask Hecaté whether it is better to be rich or starving; she will tell you that the rich send her a meal every month and that the poor make it disappear before it is even served. But go and hang yourself and don't breathe another syllable. I will not be convinced against my will.

## POVERTY

"Oh! citizens of Argos! do you hear what he says?"<sup>5</sup>

## CHREMYLUS

Invoke Pauson, your boon companion, rather.

## POVERTY

Alas! what is to become of me?

## CHREMYLUS

Get you gone, be off quick and a pleasant journey to you.

## POVERTY

But where shall I go?

## CHREMYLUS

To gaol; but hurry up, let us put an end to this.

POVERTY (*as she departs*)

One day you will recall me.

## CHREMYLUS

Then you can return: but disappear for the present. I prefer to be rich; you are free to knock your head against the walls in your rage.

## BLEPSIDEMUS

And I too welcome wealth. I want, when I leave the bath all perfumed with essences, to feast bravely with my wife and children and to fart in the faces of toilers and Poverty.

## CHREMYLUS

So that hussy has gone at last! But let us make haste to put Plutus to bed in the Temple of Asclepius.

## BLEPSIDEMUS

Let us make haste; else some bothering fellow may again come to interrupt us.

CHREMYLUS (*loudly*)

Cario, bring the coverlets and all that I have got ready from the house; let us conduct the god to the temple, taking care to observe all the proper rites.

(*CARIO comes out of the house with a bundle under one arm and leading PLUTUS with the other. CHREMYLUS and BLEPSIDEMUS join him and all four of them depart.*)

(*Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.*)

## CARIO

Oh! you old fellows, who used to dip out the broth served to the poor at the festival of Theseus with little pieces of bread hollowed like a spoon, how worthy of envy is your fate! How happy you are, both you and all just men!

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

My good fellow, what has happened to your friends? You seem the bearer of good tidings.

## CARIO

What joy for my master and even more for Plutus! The god has regained his sight; his eyes sparkle with the greatest brilliancy, thanks to the benevolent care of Asclepius.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! what transports of joy! oh! what shouts of gladness!

## CARIO

Aye! one is compelled to rejoice, whether one will or not.

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I will sing to the honour of Asclepius, the son of illustrious Zeus, with a resounding voice; he is the beneficent star which men adore.

CIREMYLUS' WIFE (*coming out of the house*)

What mean these shouts? Is there good news? With what impatience have I been waiting in the house, and for so long too!

CARIO

Quick ' quick, some wine, mistress. And drink some yourself, (*aside*) it's much to your taste. I bring you all blessings in a lump.

WIFE

Where are they?

CARIO

In my words, as you are going to see.

WIFE

Have done with trilling! come, speak.

CARIO

Listen, I am going to tell you everything from the feet to the head

WIFE

Oh! don't throw anything at my head.

CARIO

Not even the happiness that has come to you?

WIFE

No, no, nothing . . . to annoy me.

CARIO

Having arrived near to the temple with our patient, then so unfortunate, but now at the apex of happiness, of blessedness, we first led him down to the sea to purify him.

WIFE

Ah! what a singular pleasure for an old man to bathe in the cold seawater!

CARIO (*in the manner of the tragic messenger*)

Then we repaired to the temple of the god. Once the wafers and the various offerings had been consecrated upon the altar, and the cake of wheaten-meal had been handed over to the devouring Hephaestus, we made Plutus lie on a couch according to the rite, and each of us prepared himself a bed of leaves.

WIFE

Had any other folk come to beseech the deity?

## CARIO

Yes. Firstly, Neoclides, who is blind, but steals much better than those who see clearly; then many others attacked by complaints of all kinds. The lights were put out and the priest enjoined us to sleep, especially recommending us to keep silent should we hear any noise. There we were all lying down quite quietly. I could not sleep; I was thinking of a certain stew-pan full of pap placed close to an old woman and just behind her head. I had a furious longing to slip towards that side. But just as I was lifting my head, I noticed the priest, who was sweeping off both the cakes and the figs on the sacred table; then he made the round of the altars and sanctified the cakes that remained, by stowing them away in a bag. I therefore resolved to follow such a pious example and made straight for the pap.

## WIFE

You rogue! and had you no fear of the god?

## CARIO

Aye, indeed! I feared that the god with his crown on his head might have been near the stew-pan before me. I said to myself, "Like priest, like god." On hearing the noise I made, the old woman put out her hand, but I hissed and bit it, just as a sacred serpent might have done." Quick she drew back her hand, slipped down into the bed with her head beneath the coverlets and never moved again; only she let flee a fart in her fear which stank worse than a weasel. As for myself, I swallowed a goodly portion of the pap and, having made a good feed, went back to bed.

## WIFE

And did not the god come?

## CARIO

He did not tarry; and when he was near us, oh! dear! such a good joke happened. My belly was quite blown up, and I let a *thunderous* fart!

## WIFE

Doubtless the god pulled a wry face?

## CARIO

No, but Iaso blushed a little and Panacea turned her head away, holding her nose; my farts are not perfume.

## WIFE

And what did the god do?

## CARIO

He paid not the slightest heed.

WIFE

He must then be a pretty coarse kind of god?

CARIO

I don't say that, but he's used to tasting stools.

WIFE

Impudent knave, go on with you!

CARIO

Then I hid myself in my bed all a-tremble. Asclepius did the round of the patients and examined them all with great attention; then a slave placed beside him a stone mortar, a pestle and a little box.

WIFE

Of stone?

CARIO

No, not of stone.

WIFE

But how could you see all this, you arch-rascal, when you say you were hiding all the time?

CARIO

Why, great gods, through my cloak, for it's not without holes! He first prepared an ointment for Neoclides; he threw three heads of Tenian garlic into the mortar, pounded them with an admixture of fig-tree sap and lentisk, moistened the whole with Sphettian vinegar, and, turning back the patient's eyelids, applied his salve to the interior of the eyes, so that the pain might be more excruciating. Neoclides shrieked, howled, sprang towards the foot of his bed and wanted to bolt, but the god laughed and said to him, "Keep where you are with your salve; by doing this you will not go and perjure yourself before the Assembly."

WIFE

What a wise god and what a friend to our city!

CARIO

Thereupon he came and seated himself at the head of Plutus' bed, took a perfectly clean rag and wiped his eyelids; Panacea covered his head and face with a purple cloth, while the god whistled, and two enormous snakes came rushing from the sanctuary.

WIFE

Great gods!



## CARIO

They slipped gently beneath the purple cloth and, as far as I could judge, licked the patient's eyelids; for, in less time than even you need, mistress, to drain down ten beakers of wine, Plutus rose up; he could see. I clapped my hands with joy and awoke my master, and the god immediately disappeared with the serpents into the sanctuary. As for those who were lying near Plutus, you can imagine that they embraced him tenderly. Dawn broke and not one of them had closed an eye. As for myself, I did not cease thanking the god who had so quickly restored to Plutus his sight and had made Neoclides blinder than ever.

## WIFE

Oh! thou great Asclepius! How mighty is thy power! (*To CARIO*) But tell me, where is Plutus now?

## CARIO

He is approaching, escorted by an immense crowd. The rich, whose wealth is ill-gotten, are knitting their brows and shooting at him looks of fierce hate, while the just folk, who led a wretched existence, embrace him and grasp his hand in the transport of their joy; they follow in his wake, their heads wreathed with garlands, laughing and blessing their deliverer; the old men make the earth resound as they walk together keeping time. Come, all of you, all, down to the very least, dance, leap and form yourselves into a chorus; no longer do you risk being told, when you go home, "There is no meal in the bag."

## WIFE

And I, by Hecaté! I will string you a garland of cakes for the good tidings you have brought me.

## CARIO

Hurry, make haste then; our friends are close at hand.

## WIFE

I will go indoors to fetch some gifts of welcome, to celebrate these eyes that have just been opened.

*(She goes back into the house)*

## CARIO

Meantime I am going forth to meet them.

*(Exit)*

*(Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.)*

## PLUTUS

I adore thee, oh! thou divine sun, and thee I greet, thou city, the beloved of Pallas; be welcome, thou land of Cecrops, which hast received

me. Alas! what manner of men I associated with! I blush to think of it. While, on the other hand, I shunned those who deserved my friendship; I knew neither the vices of the ones nor the virtues of the others. A two-fold mistake, and in both cases equally fatal! Ah! what a misfortune was mine! But I want to change everything; and in the future I mean to prove to mankind that, if I gave to the wicked, it was against my will.

CHREMYLUS (*to the wings*)

Get you gone! Oh! what a lot of friends spring into being when you are fortunate! They dig me with their elbows and bruise my shins to prove their affection. Each one wants to greet me. What a crowd of old fellows thronged round me on the market-place!

WIFE

Oh! thou, who art dearest of all to me, and thou too, be welcome! Allow me, Plutus, to shower these gifts of welcome over you in due accord with custom.

PLUTUS

No. This is the first house I enter after having regained my sight; I shall take nothing from it, for it is my place rather to give.

WIFE

Do you refuse these gifts?

PLUTUS

I will accept them at your fireside, as custom requires. Besides, we shall thus avoid a ridiculous scene; it is not meet that the poet should throw dried figs and dainties to the spectators; it is a vulgar trick to make them laugh.<sup>7</sup>

WIFE

You are right. Look! yonder's Dexinicus, who was already getting to his feet to catch the figs as they flew past him.

(*Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.*)

CARIO

How pleasant it is, friends, to live well, especially when it costs nothing! What a deluge of blessings flood our household, and that too without our having wronged a single soul! Ah! what a delightful thing is wealth! The bin is full of white flour and the wine-jars run over with fragrant liquor; all the chests are crammed with gold and silver, it is a sight to see; the tank is full of oil, the phials with perfumes, and the garret with dried figs. Vinegar flasks, plates, stew-pots and all the platters are of brass; our rotten old wooden trenchers for the fish have to-day become dishes of

silver; even the thunder-mug is of ivory. We others, the slaves, we play at odd and even with gold pieces, and carry luxury so far that we no longer wipe our arses with stones, but use garlic stalks instead. My master, at this moment, is crowned with flowers and sacrificing a pig, a goat and a ram; it's the smoke that has driven me out, for I could no longer endure it, it hurt my eyes so.

(A JUST MAN enters, followed by a small slave-lad who carries a thread-bare cloak and a pair of badly worn sandals.)

JUST MAN

Come, my child, come with me. Let us go and find the god.

CARIO

Who's this?

JUST MAN

A man who was once wretched, but now is happy.

CARIO

A just man then?

JUST MAN

That's right.

CARIO

Well! what do you want?

JUST MAN

I come to thank the god for all the blessings he has showered on me. My father had left me a fairly decent fortune, and I helped those of my friends who were in want; it was, to my thinking, the most useful thing I could do with my fortune.

CARIO

And you were quickly ruined?

JUST MAN

Quite.

CARIO

And since then you have been living in misery?

JUST MAN

Quite; I thought I could count, in case of need, upon the friends whose property I had helped, but they turned their backs upon me and pretended not to see me.

CARIO

They laughed at you, that's obvious.

JUST MAN

Quite. With my empty coffers, I had no more friends. But my lot has changed, and so I come to the god to make him the acts of gratitude that are his due.

CARIO

But why are you bringing this old cloak, which your slave is carrying? Tell me.

JUST MAN

I wish to dedicate it to the god.

CARIO

Were you initiated into the Great Mysteries in that cloak? <sup>s</sup>

JUST MAN

No, but I shivered in it for thirteen years.

CARIO

And this footwear?

JUST MAN

These also are my winter companions.

CARIO

And you wish to dedicate them too?

JUST MAN

Certainly.

CARIO

Fine presents to offer to the god!

*(An INFORMER enters, followed by a witness )*

INFORMER *(before he sees CARIO)*

Alas! alas! I am a lost man. Ah! thrice, four, five, twelve times, or rather ten thousand times unhappy fate! Why, why must fortune deal me such rough blows?

CARIO

Oh, Apollo, my tutelary! oh! ye favourable gods! what has overtaken this man?

INFORMER (*to CARIO*)

Ah! am I not deserving of pity? I have lost everything; this cursed god has stripped me bare. Ah! if there be justice in heaven, he shall be struck blind again.

## JUST MAN

I think I know what's the matter. If this man is unfortunate, it's because he's of little account and small honesty; and indeed he looks it too.

## CARIO

Then, by Zeus! his plight is but just.

## INFORMER

He promised that if he recovered his sight, he would enrich us all unaided; whereas he has ruined more than one.

## CARIO

But whom has he thus ill-used?

## INFORMER

Me.

## CARIO

You were doubtless a villainous thief then.

## INFORMER

No, it is rather you yourselves who were such wretches: I am certain you have got my money.

## CARIO

Ha! by Demeter! an informer! What impudence! He's ravenously hungry, that's certain.

## INFORMER

You shall follow me this very instant to the market-place, where the torture of the wheel shall force the confession of your misdeeds from you.

CARIO (*with a threatening gesture*)

Watch out, now!

## JUST MAN

By Zeus the Deliverer, what gratitude all Greeks owe to Plutus, if he destroys these vile informers!

## INFORMER

You are laughing at me. Well, then I denounce you as their accomplice. Where did you steal that new cloak from? Yesterday I saw you with one utterly worn out.

JUST MAN

I fear you not, thanks to this ring, for which I paid Eudemus a drachma.

CARIO

Ah! there's no ring to preserve you from the informer's bite.

INFORMER

The insolent wretches! But, my fine jokers, you have not told me what you are up to here. Nothing good, I'm sure of that.

CARIO

Nothing of any good for you, be sure of *that*.

INFORMER

By Zeus! it's at my expense that you are about to dine.

CARIO

You and your witness, I hope you both burst . . .

JUST MAN

With an empty belly.

INFORMER

You deny it? I reckon, you villains, that there is much salt fish and roast meat in this house. (*He sniffs elaborately.*)

CARIO

Can you smell anything, rascal?

JUST MAN

The cold, perhaps.

INFORMER

Can such outrages be borne, oh, Zeus! Ye gods! how cruel it is to see me treated thus, when I am such an honest fellow and such a good citizen!

JUST MAN

You an honest man! you a good citizen!

INFORMER

A better one than any.

JUST MAN

Ah! well then, answer my questions.

INFORMER

Concerning what?

JUST MAN

Are you a husbandman?

INFORMER

D'ye take me for a fool?

JUST MAN

A merchant?

INFORMER

I assume the title, when it serves me.<sup>9</sup>

JUST MAN

Do you ply any trade?

INFORMER

No, most assuredly not!

JUST MAN

Then how do you live, if you do nothing?

INFORMER

I superintend public and private business.

JUST MAN

You do? And by what right, pray?

INFORMER

Because it pleases me to do so.

JUST MAN

Like a thief you sneak yourself in where you have no business. You are hated by all and you claim to be an honest man.

INFORMER

What, you fool? I have not the right to dedicate myself entirely to my country's service?

JUST MAN

Is the country served by vile intrigue?

INFORMER

It is served by watching that the established law is observed—by allowing no one to violate it.

JUST MAN

That's the duty of the tribunals; they are established to that end.

INFORMER

And who is the prosecutor before the dicasts?

JUST MAN

Whoever wishes to be.

INFORMER

Well then, it is I who choose to be prosecutor; and thus all public affairs fall within my province.

JUST MAN

I pity Athens for being in such vile clutches. But would you not prefer to live quietly and free from all care and anxiety?

INFORMER

To do nothing is to live an animal's life.

JUST MAN

Thus you will not change your mode of life?

INFORMER

No, though they gave me Plutus himself and the silphium of Battus.

CARIO (*to the INFORMER*)

Come, quick, off with your cloak.

(*The INFORMER does not move.*)

JUST MAN

Hi! friend! it's you they are speaking to.

CARIO

Off with your shoes.

(*The INFORMER still remains motionless.*)

JUST MAN

I say, all this is addressed to you.

INFORMER (*defiantly*)

Very well! let one of you come near me, if he dares.

CARIO

I dare.

(*He strips the INFORMER of his cloak and shoes. The witness runs away.*)

INFORMER

Alas! I am robbed of my clothes in full daylight.



## CARIO

That's what comes of meddling with other folk's business and living at their expense.

INFORMER (*over his shoulder to the departing witness*)

You see what is happening; I call you to witness.

CARIO (*laughing*)

Look how the witness whom you brought is taking to his heels.

INFORMER

Great gods! I am all alone and they assault me.

CARIO

Shout away!

INFORMER

Oh! woe, woe is me!

CARIO

Give me that old ragged cloak, that I may dress out the informer.

JUST MAN

No, no; I have dedicated it to Plutus.

CARIO

And where would your offering be better bestowed than on the shoulders of a rascal and a thief? To Plutus fine, rich cloaks should be given.

JUST MAN

And what then shall be done with these shoes? Tell me.

CARIO

I will nail them to his brow as gifts are nailed to the trunks of the wild olive.

INFORMER

I'm off, for you are the strongest, I own. But if I find someone to join me, let him be as weak as he will, I will summon this god, who thinks himself so strong, before the court this very day, and denounce him as manifestly guilty of overturning the democracy by his will alone and without the consent of the Senate or the Assembly.

JUST MAN

Now that you are rigged out from head to foot with my old clothes, hasten to the bath and stand there in the front row to warm yourself better; that's the place I formerly had.

## CARIO

Ah! the bath-man would grab you by the balls and fling you through the door; he would only need to see you to appraise you at your true value. . . . But let us go in, friend, that you may address your thanksgivings to the god.

*(Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.)*

*(An OLD WOMAN enters, dressed as a young girl and trying to walk in a youthful and alluring manner. She carries a plate of food.)*

OLD WOMAN (*coolly*)

My *dear* old men, am I near the house where the new god lives, or have I missed the road?

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You are at his door, my pretty little maid, who question us so sweetly.

## OLD WOMAN

Then I will summon someone in the house.

## CHREMYLUS

No need. I am here myself. But what brings you here?

## OLD WOMAN

Ah! a cruel, unjust fate! My dear friend, this god has made life unbearable to me through ceasing to be blind.

## CHREMYLUS

What does this mean? Can you be a female informer?

## OLD WOMAN

Most certainly not.

## CHREMYLUS

Have you *drunk* up your money then?

## OLD WOMAN

You are mocking me! No! I am being devoured with a consuming fire.

## CHREMYLUS

Then tell me what is consuming you so fiercely.

## OLD WOMAN

Listen! I loved a young man, who was poor, but so handsome, so well-built, so honest! He readily gave way to all I desired and acquitted himself so well! I, for my part, refused him nothing.

CHREMYLUS

And what did he generally ask of you?

OLD WOMAN

Very little; he bore himself towards me with astonishing discretion! perchance twenty drachmae for a cloak or eight for footwear; sometimes he begged me to buy tunics for his sisters or a little mantle for his mother; at times he needed four bushels of corn.

CHREMYLUS

That's very little, in truth; I admire his modesty.

OLD WOMAN

And it wasn't as a reward for his complacency that he ever asked me for anything, but as a matter of pure friendship; a cloak I had given would remind him from whom he had got it.

CHREMYLUS

It was a fellow who loved you madly.

OLD WOMAN

But it's no longer so, for the faithless wretch has sadly altered! I had sent him this cake with the sweetmeats you see here on this dish and let him know that I would visit him in the evening . . .

CHREMYLUS

Well?

OLD WOMAN

He sent me back my presents and added this tart to them, on condition that I never set foot in his house again. Besides, he sent me this message, "Once upon a time the Milesians were brave."

CHREMYLUS

An honest lad, indeed! What do you expect? When poor, he would devour anything; now he is rich, he no longer cares for lentils.

OLD WOMAN

Formerly he came to me every day.

CHREMYLUS

To see if you were being buried?

OLD WOMAN

No! he longed to hear the sound of my voice.

CHIREMYLUS (*aside*)

And to carry off some present.

OLD WOMAN

If I was downcast, he would call me his little duck or his little dove in a most tender manner . . .

CHIREMYLUS (*aside*)

And then would ask for the money to buy a pair of sandals.

OLD WOMAN

When I was at the Mysteries of Eleusis in a carriage, someone made eyes at me; he was so jealous that he beat me the whole of that day.

CHIREMYLUS (*aside*)

That was because he liked to feed alone.

OLD WOMAN

He told me I had very beautiful hands.

CHIREMYLUS (*aside*)

Aye, no doubt, when they handed him twenty drachmae.

OLD WOMAN

That my whole body breathed a sweet perfume.

CHIREMYLUS (*aside*)

Yes, like enough, if you poured him out Thasian wine.

OLD WOMAN

That my glance was gentle and charming.

CHIREMYLUS (*aside*)

He was no fool. He knew how to drag drachmae from a sex-starved old woman.

OLD WOMAN

Ah! the god has done very, very wrong, saying he would support the victims of injustice.

CHIREMYLUS

Well, what should he do? Speak, and it shall be done.

OLD WOMAN

Compel him, whom I have loaded with benefits, to repay them in his turn; if not, he does not merit the least of the god's favours.

CHREMYLUS

And did he not do this every night?

OLD WOMAN

He swore he would never leave me, as long as I lived.

CHREMYLUS

Aye, rightly; but he thinks you are no longer alive.

OLD WOMAN

Ah! friend, I am pining away with grief.

CHREMYLUS (*aside*)

You are *rotting* away, it seems to me.

OLD WOMAN

I have grown so thin, I could slip through a ring.

CHREMYLUS

Yes, if it were as large as the hoop of a sieve.

(*A young man enters, wearing a garland on his head and carrying a torch in his hand.*)

OLD WOMAN

But here is the youth, the cause of my complaint; he looks as though he were going to a festival.

CHREMYLUS

Yes, if his chaplet and his torch are any guides.

YOUTH (*to the OLD WOMAN, with cool politeness*)

Greeting to you.

OLD WOMAN (*in a puzzled tone*)

What was that he said?

YOUTH

My ancient old dear, you have grown white very quickly, by heaven!

OLD WOMAN

Oh! what an insult!

CHREMYLUS

It is a long time, then, since he saw you?

OLD WOMAN

A long time? My god! he was with me yesterday.

CHREMYLUS

It must be, then, that, unlike other people, he sees more clearly when he's drunk.

OLD WOMAN

No, but I have always known him for an insolent fellow.

YOUTH

Oh! divine Posidon! Oh, ye gods of old age! what wrinkles she has on her face!

*(He holds his torch close to her, in order to inspect her more closely.)*

OLD WOMAN

Oh! oh! keep your distance with that torch.

CHREMYLUS *(aside)*

It's just as well, if a single spark were to reach her, she would catch fire like an old olive branch.

YOUTH

I propose to have a game with you.

OLD WOMAN *(eagerly)*

Where, naughty boy?

YOUTH

Here. Take some nuts in your hand.

OLD WOMAN

What game is this?

YOUTH

Let's play at guessing how many . . . teeth you have.

CHREMYLUS

Ah! I'll tell you; she's got three, or perhaps four.

YOUTH

Pay up; you've lost! she has only one single grinder.

OLD WOMAN

You wretch! you're not in your right senses. Do you insult me thus before this crowd?

YOUTH

I am washing you thoroughly; that's doing you a service.

CHREMYLUS

No, no! as she is there, she can still deceive; but if this white-lead is washed off, her wrinkles will come out plainly.

OLD WOMAN

You are only an old fool!

YOUTH

Ah! he is playing the gallant, he is playing with your tits, and thinks I do not see it.

OLD WOMAN (*to* CHREMYLUS)

Oh! no, by Aphrodité, don't do that, you naughty jealous fellow.

CHREMYLUS

Oh! most certainly not, by Hecaté! Verily and indeed I would need to be mad! But, young man, I cannot forgive you, if you cast off this beautiful child.

YOUTH

Why, I adore her.

CHREMYLUS

But nevertheless she accuses you . . .

YOUTH

Accuses me of what?

CHREMYLUS

. . . of having told her insolently, "Once upon a time the Milesians were brave."

YOUTH

Oh! I shall not dispute with you about her.

CHREMYLUS

Why not?

YOUTH

Out of respect for your age; with anyone but you I should not be so easy; come, take the girl and be happy.

CHREMYLUS

I see, I see, you don't want her any more.

OLD WOMAN

Nay! this is a thing that cannot be allowed.

## YOUTH

I cannot argue with a woman who has been laid by every one of these thirteen thousand men.

*(He points to the audience.)*

## CHREMYLUS

Yet, since you liked the wine, you should now consume the lees.

## YOUTH

But these lees are quite rancid and fusty.

## CHREMYLUS

Pass them through a straining-cloth; they'll clarify.

## YOUTH

But I want to go in with you to offer these chaplets to the god.

## OLD WOMAN

And I too have something to tell him.

## YOUTH

Then I won't enter.

## CHREMYLUS

Come, have no fear; she won't harm you.

## YOUTH

That's true; I've been managing the old bark so long.

## OLD WOMAN

Go in; I'll follow after you.

*(They enter the house.)*

## CHREMYLUS

Good gods! that old hag has fastened herself to her youth like a limpet to its rock.

*(He follows them in.)*

*(Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.)*

*(HERMES enters and begins knocking on the door.)*

CARIO *(opening the door)*

Who is knocking at the door? Halloa! I see no one; it was then by chance it gave forth that plaintive tone.

HERMES *(to CARIO, who is about to close the door)*

Cario! stop!



## CARIO

Eh! friend, was it you who knocked so loudly? Tell me.

## HERMES

No, I was going to knock and you forestalled me by opening. Come, call your master quick, then his wife and his children, then his slave and his dog, then yourself and his pig.

## CARIO

And what's it all about?

## HERMES

It's about this, rascal! Zeus wants to serve you all with the same sauce and hurl the lot of you into the Barathrum.

CARIO (*aside*)

Have a care for your tongue, you bearer of ill tidings! (*To HERMES*) But why does he want to treat us in that scurvy fashion?

## HERMES

Because you have committed the most dreadful crime. Since Plutus has recovered his sight, there is nothing for us other gods, neither incense, nor laurels, nor cakes, nor victims, nor anything in the world.

## CARIO

And you will never be offered anything more; you governed us too ill

## HERMES

I care nothing at all about the other gods, but it's myself. I tell you I am dying of hunger.

## CARIO

That's reasoning like a wise fellow.

## HERMES

Formerly, from earliest dawn, I was offered all sorts of good things in the wine-shops,—wine-cakes, honey, dried figs, in short, dishes worthy of Hermes. Now, I lie the livelong day on my back, with my legs in the air, famishing.

## CARIO

And quite right too, for you often had them punished who treated you so well.

## HERMES

Ah! the lovely cake they used to knead for me on the fourth of the month!

CARIO

You recall it vainly; your regrets are useless!

HERMES

Ah! the ham I was wont to devour!

CARIO

Well then! make use of your legs and hop on one leg upon the wine-skin,<sup>10</sup> to while away the time.

HERMES

Oh! the grilled entrails I used to swallow down!

CARIO

Your own have got the colic, I think.

HERMES

Oh! the delicious tippie, half-wine, half-water!

CARIO

Here, take this and be off. (*He farts.*)

HERMES (*in tragic style*)

Would you render service to the friend that loves you?

CARIO

Willingly, if I can.

HERMES

Give me some well-baked bread and a big hunk of the victims they are sacrificing in your house.

CARIO

That would be stealing.

HERMES

Do you forget, then, how I used to take care he knew nothing about it when you were stealing something from your master?

CARIO

Because I used to share it with you, you rogue; some cake or other always came your way.

HERMES

Which afterwards you ate up all by yourself.<sup>11</sup>

CARIO

But then you did not share the blows when I was caught.

## HERMES

Forget past injuries, now you have taken Phylé. Ah! how I should like to live with you! Take pity and receive me.

## CARIO

You would leave the gods to stop here?

## HERMES

One is much better off among you.

## CARIO

What! you would desert! Do you think that is honest?

## HERMES

"Where I live well, there is my country."

## CARIO

But how could we employ you here?

## HERMES

Place me near the door; I am the watchman god and would shift off the robbers.

## CARIO

Shift off! Ah! but we have no love for shifts.

## HERMES

Entrust me with business dealings.

## CARIO

But we are rich; why should we keep a haggling Hermes?

## HERMES

Let me intrigue for you.

## CARIO

No, no, intrigues are forbidden; we believe in good faith.

## HERMES

I will work for you as a guide.

## CARIO

But the god sees clearly now, so we no longer want a guide.

## HERMES

Well then, I will preside over the games. Ah! what can you object to in that? Nothing is fitter for Plutus than to give scenic and gymnastic games.<sup>12</sup>

CARIO

How useful it is to have so many names! Here you have found the means of earning your bread. I don't wonder the jurymen so eagerly try to get entered for many tribunals.

HERMES

So then, you admit me on these terms?

CARIO

Go and wash the entrails of the victims at the well, so that you may show yourself serviceable at once.

(*They both enter the house. A PRIEST of ZEUS comes hurrying in.*)

PRIEST

Can anyone tell me where Chremylus is?

CHREMYLUS (*emerging from the house*)

What would you with him, friend?

PRIEST

Much ill. Since Plutus has recovered his sight, I am perishing of starvation; I, the priest of Zeus the Deliverer, have nothing to eat!

CHREMYLUS

And what is the cause of that, pray?

PRIEST

No one dreams of offering sacrifices.

CHREMYLUS

Why not?

PRIEST

Because all men are rich. Ah! when they had nothing, the merchant who escaped from shipwreck, the accused who was acquitted, all immolated victims, another would sacrifice for the success of some wish and the priest joined in at the feast; but now there is not the smallest victim, not one of the faithful in the temple, but thousands who come there to take a crap.

CHREMYLUS

Why don't you take your share of *those* offerings?

PRIEST (*ignoring this*)

Hence I think I too am going to say good-bye to Zeus the Deliverer, and stop here myself.

## CHREMYLUS

Be at ease, all will go well, if it so please the god. Zeus the Deliverer is here; he came of his own accord.

## PRIEST

Ha! that's good news.

*(He moves toward the door.)*

## CHREMYLUS

Wait a little; we are going to install Plutus presently in the place he formerly occupied behind the Temple of Athené; there he will watch over our treasures for ever. *(Calling out)* Let lighted torches be brought to the priest. Take these and walk in solemn procession in front of the god.

## PRIEST

That's magnificent!

## CHREMYLUS

Let Plutus be summoned.

*(Plutus comes out of the house, followed by the OLD WOMAN.)*

## OLD WOMAN

And I, what am I to do?

## CHREMYLUS

Take the pots of vegetables which we are going to offer to the god in honour of his installation and carry them on your head; you just happen luckily to be wearing a beautiful embroidered robe.

## OLD WOMAN

And what about the object of my coming?

## CHREMYLUS

Everything shall be according to your wish. The young man will be with you this evening.

## OLD WOMAN

Oh! if you promise me his visit, I will right willingly carry the pots.  
*(She puts them on her head.)*

## CHREMYLUS

Those are strange pots indeed! Generally the scum rises to the top of the pots, but here the pots are raised to the top of the old woman.<sup>13</sup>  
*(Plutus begins to march solemnly off the stage; the OLD WOMAN follows him.)*

## LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us withdraw without more tarrying, and follow the others, singing  
as we go

*(They do so.)*

## NOTES FOR PLUTUS

1. A sacrifice had naturally preceded the consultation of the oracle, and Cario has brought home the remnants, which were customarily given to the other members of the household.

2. An imitation of the sound of plucked strings on a lyre.

3. This comedy exhibits numerous indications of the deplorable economic conditions prevalent at Athens in the early decades of the fourth century.

4. The baths were the refuge of the poor in the winter, and these unfortunates would seem to have sometimes got too close to the furnaces which heated the water.

5. A line from the lost *Telephus* of Euripides; Aristophanes had already quoted this in *The Knights* (813).

6. The temple of Asclepius naturally contained several of the snakes which were sacred to that deity.

7. This seems to have become a fairly common practice, and Aristophanes has already disclaimed it, in *The Wasps* (58).

8. The point of Cario's question is not entirely clear and has been variously explained; it seems probable that the clothes worn for initiation were the oldest ones possessed.

9. Merchants were exempt from military service and it was thus occasionally useful to be such a person.

10. At feasts of Dionysus a game was played in which the competitors hopped one-legged on a full and greased wine-skin.

11. Hermes, as god of thefts, normally received offerings of cakes from Cario, but even these did not advantage him, for the slave would eat them soon after placing them on the altar. Such offerings were regularly consumed either by the priest of the god involved or by the person who had made the sacrifice.

12. Such spectacles were normally provided by the wealthy.

13. A pun on the two meanings of the Greek word *graus*, "old woman" and "scum."